THE CITY OF DELIGHT

ELIZABETH MILLER

Very Good AW 8-30-99 JERUSALEM

THE CITY OF DELIGHT

Philadelphus looked down upon his prize.—*Page 81*

THE CITY OF DELIGHT

A LOVE DRAMA OF THE SIEGE AND FALL OF JERUSALEM

BY

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"The Yoke" and "Saul of Tarsus,"

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TO
MY ELDER BROTHER
OTTO MILLER

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CHAPTER I

A PRINCE'S BRIDE

The chief merchant of Ascalon stood in the guest-chamber of his house.

Although it was a late winter day the old man was clad in the free white garments of a midsummer afternoon, for to the sorrow of Philistia the cold season of the year sixty-nine had been warm, wet and miasmic. An old woman entering presently glanced at the closed windows of the apartment when she noted the flushed face of the merchant but she made no movement to have them opened. More than the warmth of the day was engaging the attention of the grave old man, and the woman, by dress and manner of equal rank with him, stood aside until he could give her a moment.

His porter bowed at his side.

"The servants of Philip of Tyre are without," he said. "Shall they enter?"

"They have come for the furnishings," Costobarus answered. "Take thou all the household but Momus and Hiram, and dismantle the rooms for them. Begin in the library; then the sleeping-rooms; this chamber next; the kitchen last of all. Send Hiram to the stables to except three good camels from the herd for our use. Let Momus look to the baggage. Where is Keturah?"

A woman servant hastening after a line of men bearing a great divan, picking up the draperies and pillows that had dropped, stopped and salaamed to her master.

"Is our apparel ready?" he asked.

"Prepared, master," was the response.

"Then send hither —" But at that moment a man-servant dressed in the garb of a physician hastened into the chamber. Without awaiting the notice of his master he hurried up and whispered in his ear. Costobarus' face grew instantly grave.

"How near?" he asked anxiously.

"In the next house — but a moment since. The household hath fled," was the low answer.

"Haste, haste!" Costobarus cried to the rush of servants about him. "Lose no time. We must be

gone from this place before mid-afternoon. Laodice! Where is Laodice?" he inquired.

Then his wife who had stood aside spoke.

"She is not yet prepared," she explained unreadily. "She needs a frieze cloak —"

Costobarus broke in by beckoning his wife to one side, where the servants could not hear him say compassionately,

"Let there be no delay for small things, Hannah. Let us haste, for Laodice is going on the Lord's business."

"A matter of a day only," Hannah urged. "A delay that is further necessary, for Aquila's horse is lame."

The old man shook his head and looked away to see a man-servant stagger out under a load of splendid carpets. The old woman came close.

"The wayside is ambushed and the wilderness is patrolled with danger, Costobarus," she said. "Of a certainty you will not take Laodice out into a country perilous for caravans and armies!"

"These very perils are the signs of the call of the hour," he maintained. "She dare not fail to respond. The Deliverer cometh; every prophecy is fulfilled.

Rather rejoice that you have prepared your daughter for this great use. Be glad that you have borne her."

But in Hannah's face wavered signs of another interpretation of these things. She broke in on him without the patience to wait until he had completed his sentence.

"Are they prophecies of hope which are fulfilled, or the words of the prophet of despair?" she insisted. "What saith Daniel of this hour? Did he not name it the abomination of desolation? Said he not that the city and the sanctuary should be destroyed, that there should be a flood and that unto the end of the war desolations shall be determined? Desolations, Costobarus! And Laodice is but a child and delicately reared!"

"All these things may come to pass and not a hair of the heads of the chosen people be harmed," he assured her.

"But Laodice it too young to have part in the conflict of nations, the business of Heaven and earth and the end of all things!"

A courier strode into the hall and approached Costobarus, saw that he was engaged in conversation and

stopped. The merchant noted him and withdrew to read the message which the man carried.

"A letter from Philadelphus," he said over his shoulder, as he moved away from Hannah. "He hath landed in Cæsarea with his cousin Julian of Ephesus. He will proceed at once to Jerusalem. We have no time to lose. Ah, Momus?"

He spoke to a servant who had limped into the hall and stood waiting for his notice. He was the ruin of a man, physically powerful but as a tree wrecked by storm and grown strong again in spite of its mutilation. Pestilence in years long past had attacked him and had left him dumb, distorted of feature, wry-necked and stiffened in the right leg and arm. His left arm, forced to double duty, had become tremendously muscular, his left hand unusually dexterous. Much of his facial distortion was the result of his efforts to convey his ideas by expression and by his attempts to overcome the interference of his wry neck with the sweep of his vision.

"Whom have we in our party, Momus?" Costobarus asked. As the man made rapid, uncouth signs, the master interpreted.

"Keturah, Hiram and Aquila — and thou and I,

Momus. Three camels, one of which is the beast of burden. Good! Aquila will ride a horse; ha! a horse in a party of camels — well, perhaps — if he were bought in Ascalon. How? What? St—t! The physician told me even now. Let none of the household know it — above all things not thy mistress!" The last sentence was delivered in a whisper in response to certain uneasy gestures the mute had made. The man bowed and withdrew.

A second servitor now approached with papers which the merchant inspected and signed hastily with ink and stylus which the clerk bore. When this last item was disposed of, Hannah was again at her husband's side.

"Costobarus," she whispered, "it is known that the East Gate of the Temple, which twenty Levites can close only with effort, opened of itself in the sixth hour of the night!"

"A sign that God reëntereth His house," the merchant explained.

"A sign, O my husband, that the security of the Holy House is dissolved of its own accord for the advantage of its enemies!"

Costobarus observed two huge Ethiopians who ap-

peared bewildered at the threshold of the unfamiliar interior, looking for the master of the house to tell them what to do. The merchant motioned toward a tall ebony case that stood against one of the walls and showed them that they were to carry it out. Hannah continued:

"And thou hast not forgotten that night when the priests at the Pentecost, entering the inner court, were thrown down by the trembling of the Temple and that a vast multitude, which they could not see, cried: 'Let us go hence!' And that dreadful sunset which we watched and which all Israel saw when armies were seen fighting in the skies and cities with toppling towers and rocking walls fell into red clouds and vanished!"

"What of thyself, Hannah?" he broke in. "Art thou ready to depart for Tyre? Philip will leave to-morrow. Do not delay him. Go and prepare."

But the woman rushed on to indiscretion, in her desperate intent to stop the journey to Jerusalem at any cost.

"But there are those of good repute here in Ascalon, sober men and excellent women, who say that our hope for the Branch of David is too late — that

Israel is come to judgment, this hour — for He is come and gone and we received Him not!"

Costobarus turned upon her sharply.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"O my husband," she insisted hopefully, "it measures up with prophecy! And they who speak thus confidently say that He prophesied the end of the Holy City, and that this is not the Advent, but doom!"

"It is the Nazarene apostasy," he exclaimed in alarm, "alive though the power of Rome and the diligence of the Sanhedrim have striven to destroy it these forty years! Now the poison hath entered mine own house!"

A servant bowed within earshot. Costobarus turned to him hastily.

"Philip of Tyre," the attendant announced.

"Let him enter," Costobarus said. "Go, Hannah; make Laodice ready — preparations are almost complete; be not her obstacle."

"But — but," she insisted with whitening lips, "I have not said that I believe all this. I only urge that, in view of this time of war, of contending prophecies and of all known peril, that we should keep her, who is

our one ewe lamb, our tender flower, our Rose of Sharon, yet within shelter until the signs are manifest and the purpose of the Lord God is made clear."

He turned to her slowly. There was pain on his face, suffering that she knew her words had evoked and, more than that, a yearning to relent. She was ashamed and not hopeful, but her mother-love was stronger than her wifely pity.

"Must I command you, Hannah?" he asked.

Her figure, drawn up with the intensity of her wishfulness, relaxed. Her head drooped and slowly she turned away. Costobarus looked after her and struggled with rising emotion. But the curtain dropped behind her and left him alone.

A moment later the curtains over the arch parted and a middle-aged Jew, richly habited, stood there. He raised his hand for the blessing of the threshold, then embraced Costobarus with more warmth than ceremony.

"What is this I hear?" he demanded with affectionate concern. "Thou leavest Ascalon for the peril of Jerusalem?"

"Can Jerusalem be more perilous than Ascalon this hour?" Costobarus asked.

"Yes, by our fathers!" Philip declared. "Nothing can be so bad as the condition of the Holy City. But what has happened? Three days ago thou wast as securely settled here as a barnacle on a shore-rock! To-day thou sendest me word: 'Lo! the time long expected hath come; I go hence to Jerusalem.' What is it, my brother?"

"Sit and listen."

Philip looked about him. The divan was there, stripped of its covering of fine rugs, but the room otherwise was without furniture. Prepared for surprise, the Tyrian let no sign of his curiosity escape him, and, sitting, leaned on his knees and waited.

"Philadelphus Maccabaeus hath sent to me, bidding me send Laodice to him — in Jerusalem," Costobarus said in a low voice.

Philip's eyes widened with sudden comprehension.

"He hath returned!" he exclaimed in a whisper.

For a time there was silence between the two old men, while they gazed at each other. Then Philip's manner became intensely confident.

"I see!" he exclaimed again, in the same whisper. "The throne is empty! He means to possess it, now that Agrippa hath abandoned it!"

Costobarus pressed his lips together and bowed his head emphatically. Again there was silence.

"Think of it!" Philip exclaimed presently.

"I have done nothing else since his messenger arrived at daybreak. Little, little, did I think when I married Laodice to him, fourteen years ago, that the lad of ten and the little child of four might one day be king and queen over Judea!"

Philip shook his head slowly and his gaze settled to the pavement. Presently he drew in a long breath.

"He is twenty-four," he began thoughtfully. "He has all the learning of the pagans, both of letters and of war; he — Ah! But is he capable?"

"He is the great-grandson of Judas Maccabaeus! That is enough! I have not seen him since the day he wedded Laodice and left her to go to Ephesus, but no man can change the blood of his fathers in him. And Philip — he shall have no excuse to fail. He shall be moneyed; he shall be moneyed!"

Costobarus leaned toward his friend and with a sweep of his hand indicated the stripped room. It was a noble chamber. The stamp of the elegant simplicity of Cyrus, the Persian, was upon it. The ancient blue and white mosaics that had been laid by

the Parsee builder and the fretwork and twisted pillars were there, but the silky carpets, the censers and the chairs of fine woods were gone. Costobarus looked steadily at the perplexed countenance of Philip.

"Seest thou how much I believe in this youth?" he asked.

A shade of uneasiness crossed Philip's forehead.

"Thou art no longer young, Costobarus," he said, "and disappointments go hard with us, at our age — especially, especially."

"I shall not be disappointed," Costobarus declared.

The friendly Jew looked doubtful.

"The nation is in a sad state," he observed. "We have cause. The procurators have been of a nature with their patrons, the emperors. It is enough but to say that! But Vespasian Cæsar is another kind of man. He is tractable. Young Titus, who will succeed him, is well-named the Darling of Mankind. We could get much redress from these if we would be content with redress. But no! We must revert to the days of Saul!"

"Yes; but they declare they will have no king but God; no commander but the Messiah to come; no order but primitive impulse! But the Maccabee will

change all that! It is but the far swing of the first revolt. Jerusalem is ready for reason at this hour, it is said."

"Yes," Philip assented with a little more spirit. "It hath reached us, who have dealings with the East, that there is a better feeling in the city. Such slaughter has been done there among the Sadducees, such hordes of rebels from outlying subjugated towns have poured their license and violence in upon the safe City of Delight, that the citizens of Jerusalem actually look forward to the coming of Titus as a deliverance from the afflictions which their own people have visited upon them."

"The hour for the Maccabee, indeed," Costobarus ruminated.

"And the hour for Him whom we all expect," Philip added in a low tone. Costobarus bowed his head. Presently he drew a scroll from the folds of his ample robe.

"Hear what Philadelphus writes me:

Cæsarea, II Kal. Jul. XX.

To Costobarus, greetings and these by messenger;

I learn on arriving in this city that Judea is in truth no man's country. Wherefore it can be mine by cession or conquest. It is mine, however, by right. I shall possess it.

I go hence to Jerusalem.

Fail not to send my wife thither and her dowry. Aquila, my emissary, will safely conduct her. Trust him.

Proceed with despatch and husband the dowry of your daughter, since it is to be the corner-stone of a new Israel.

Peace to you and yours. To my wife my affection and my loyalty.

PHILADELPHUS MACCABAEUS.

Nota Bene. Julian of Ephesus accompanies me. He is my cousin. He will in all probability meet your daughter at the Gate.

MACCABAEUS."

Slowly the old man rolled the writing.

"He wastes no words," Philip mused. "He writes as a siege-engine talks — without quarter."

Costobarus nodded.

"So I am giving him two hundred talents," he said deliberately.

"Two hundred talents!" Philip echoed.

"And I summoned thee, Philip, to say that in addition to my house and its goods, thou canst have my shipping, my trade, my caravans, which thou hast coveted so long at a price — at that price. I shall give Laodice two hundred talents."

"Two hundred talents!" Philip echoed again, somewhat taken aback.

Costobarus went to a cabinet on the wall and drew

forth a shittim-wood case which he unlocked. Therefrom he took a small casket and opened it. He then held it so that the sun, falling into it, set fire to a bed of loose gems mingled without care for kind or value — a heap of glowing color emitting sparks.

"Here are one hundred of the talents," Costobarus said.

A flash of understanding lighted Philip's face not unmingled with the satisfaction of a shrewd Jew who has pleased himself at business. One hundred talents, then, for the best establishment in five cities, in all the Philistine country. But why? Costobarus supplied the answer at that instant.

"I would depart with my daughter by mid-afternoon," he said.

"I doubt the counting houses; if I had known sooner —" Philip began.

"Aquila arrived only this morning. I sent a messenger to you at once."

Philip rose.

"We waste time in talk. I shall inform thee by messenger presently. God speed thee! My blessings on thy son-in-law and on thy daughter!"

Costobarus rose and took his friend's hand.

"Thou shalt have the portion of the wise-hearted man in this kingdom. And this yet further, my friend. If perchance the uncertainties of travel in this distressed land should prove disastrous and I should not return, I shall leave a widow here — "

"And in that instance, be at peace. I am thy brother."

Costobarus pressed Philip's hand.

"Farewell," he said; and Philip embraced him and went forth.

Costobarus turned to one of his closed windows and thrust it open, for the influence of the spring sun had made itself felt in the past important hour for Costobarus.

Noon stood beautiful and golden over the city. The sky was clean-washed and blue, and the surface of the Mediterranean, glimpsed over white house-tops that dropped away toward the sea-front, was a wandering sheet of flashing silver. Here and there were the ruins of the last year's warfare, but over the fallen walls of gray earth the charity of running vines and the new growth of the spring spread a beauty both tender and compassionate.

In such open spaces inner gardens were exposed

and almond trees tossed their crowns of white bloom over pleached arbors of old grape-vines. Here the Mediterranean birds sang with poignant sweetness while the new-budded limbs of the oleanders tilted suddenly under their weight as they circled from covert to covert.

But the energy of the young spring was alive only in the birds and the blossoming orchards. Wherever the solid houses fronted in unbroken rows the passages between, there were no open windows, no carpets swung from latticed balconies; no buyers moved up the roofed-over Street of Bazaars. Not in all the range of the old man's vision was to be seen a living human being. For the chief city of the Philistine country Ascalon was nerveless and still. At times immense and ponderous creaking sounded in the distance, as if a great rusted crane swung in the wind. Again there were distant, voluminous flutterings, as if neglected and loosened sails flapped. Idle roaming donkeys brayed and a dog shut up and forgotten in a compound barked incessantly. Presently there came faint, far-off, failing cries that faded into silence. The Jew's brow contracted but he did not move.

From his position, he could see the port to the east

packed with lifeless vessels. The stretches of stone wharf and the mole were vacant and littered with rubbish. The yard-arms of abandoned freighters were peculiarly beaded with tiny black shapes that moved from time to time. Far out at sea, so far that a blue mist embraced its base and set its sails mysteriously afloat in air, a great galley, with all canvas crowded on, sped like a frightened bird past the port that had once been its haven.

A strange compelling odor stole up from the city. Costobarus glanced down into his garden below him. It was a terraced court, with vine-covered earthen retaining walls supporting each successive tier and terminating against a domed gate flanked on either side by a tall conical cypress.

He noted, on the flagging of the walk leading by flights of steps down to the gate, a heap of garments with broad brown and yellow stripes. Wondering at the untidiness of his gardener in leaving his tunic here while he worked, Costobarus looked away toward the large stones that lay here and there in gutters and on grass-plots, remnants of the work of the Roman catapults the previous summer. In the walls of houses were unrepaired breaches, where the wounds of the

missiles showed. On a slight eminence overlooking the city from the west center-poles of native cedar which had supported Roman tents were still standing. But no garrison was there now, though the signs of the savage Roman obsession still lay on the remnants of the prostrate western wall. So as Costobarus' gaze wandered he did not see far above that heap of striped garments in his garden walk, fixed like an enchanted thing, moveless, dead-calm, a great desert vulture poised in air. Presently another and yet another materialized out of the blue, growing larger as they fell down to the level of their fellow. Slowly the three swooped down over the heap on the garden walk. The tiny black shapes that beaded the yard-arms in port spread great wings and soared solemnly into Ascalon. The three vultures dropped noiselessly on the pavement.

Cries began suddenly somewhere nearer and instantly the tremendous booming of a great oriental gong from the heathen quarters swept heavy floods of sound over the outcry and drowned it. The vultures flew up hastily and Costobarus saw them for the first time. A chill rushed over him; revulsion of feeling showed vividly on his face. He shut the window.

Noon was high over Ascalon and Pestilence was Cæsar within its walls.

It was the penalty of warfare, the long black shadow that the passage of a great army casts upon a battling nation. Physicians could not give it a name. It seized upon healthy victims, rent them, blasted them and cast them dead and distorted in their tracks, before help could reach them. It passed like fire on a high wind through whole countries and left behind it silence and feeding vultures.

As Costobarus turned from his window to pace up and down his chamber, Hannah's argument came back to him with new energy. He felt with a kind of panic that his confident answer to her might have been wrong. When a girl appeared in the archway, he moved impulsively toward her, as if to retract the command that would send her out into this land that the Lord had spoken against, but the strength and repose in her face communicated itself to him.

Above all other suggestions in her presence was that overpowering richness of oriental beauty which no other kind in the world may surpass in its appeal to the loves of men. Enough of the Roman stock in her line had given structural firmness and stature to a

type which at her age would have developed weight and duskiness, but she was taller and more slender than the women of her race, and supple and alive and splendid. About her hips was knotted a silken scarf of red and white and green with long undulant fringes that added to the lithe grace in her movements. Under it was a glistening garment of silver tissue that reached to the small ankles laced about by the ribbons of white sandals. For sleeves there were netted fringes through which the fine luster of her arms was visible. About her wrists, her throat and in her hair, heavy and shining black, were golden coins that marked her steps with stealthy tinkling.

Costobarus, in spite of the shock of doubt and fear in his brain, looked at her as if with the happy eyes of the astonished Maccabee. In those full tender lips, in the slope of those black, silken brows, in the sparkling behind the dusky slumbrous eyes, there was all the fire and generosity and limitless charm that should make her lover's world a place of delight and perfume and music.

"How is it with you, Laodice?" he asked, faltering a little.

"I am prepared, my father," she answered.

"I commend your despatch. I would be gone within an hour."

She bowed and Costobarus regarded her with growing wistfulness. At this last moment his love was to become his obstacle, his fear for his child his one cowardice.

"Dost thou remember him?" he asked without preliminary.

Laodice answered as if the thought were first in her mind.

"Not at all; and yet, if I could remember him, I may not discover in the man of four-and-twenty anything of the lad of ten."

"He may not have changed. There are such natures, and, as I recall him, his may well be one of these. His disposition from childhood to boyhood did not change. When I knew him in Jerusalem, he was worthy the notice of a man. The manner he had there he bore with him to this, a smaller city, and hence to Ephesus, a city of another kind. It was good to see him examine the world, reject this and that and look upon his choice proudly. He made the schools observe him, consider him. He did not enter them for alteration, nor was he shut up in a shell of

self-satisfaction. He entered them as a citizen of the world and as an examiner of all philosophy. Yet the world taught him nothing. It gave him merely the open school where regulation and atmosphere helped him to teach himself. O wife of a child, thou shalt not be ashamed of thy husband, man-grown!"

"How is he favored?" she asked with the first maiden hesitation showing in the question.

"He was slender and dark and promised to be tall. He was quick in movement, quick in temper, resourceful, aye, even shifty, I should say; stubborn, cold in heart, hard to please."

"Fit attributes for a king," she said, half to herself, "yet he will be no soft husband."

Costobarus looked away from her and was silent for a time.

"Daughter," he said finally, "thou hast learned indeed that thine is to be no luxurious life. In thy restrained heart there are no dreams. Let not thy youth, when thou seest him, put obstacle in the way of thy duty. Whether thou lovest him or lovest him not, he is thy husband, thy fellow in a great labor for God and for Israel. Remember the times and the portents and shut thine ears against selfish desire. Thou seest

Judea. That which the Lord hath uttered against it through the prophets has come to pass. Abandon thy hopes in all save the Son of God; forget thyself; prepare to give all and expect nothing but the coming of the King! For verily thou lookest over the edge of the world past the very end of time!"

The solemn announcement of the Advent by this white-bearded prophet should have discovered in her a very human and terrified girl. But it was no new tidings to her. Since her earliest recollection she had heard it, expected it, contemplated it, till the magnitude and terror of it had been lost in its familiarity. She clasped her hands and dropped her eyes and her lips moved in a silent prayer.

Costobarus remained for a space sunk in glorified meditation. But presently he raised himself, with signs of his recent feeling showing on his face.

"Send hither thy mother; bid Aquila and our servants stand here before me a little later."

She bowed and withdrew. As she passed out a servant stepped aside to give her room and at a sign from his master approached.

"A messenger from Philip of Tyre," he said.

A moment later an old courier carrying a sheep-

skin wallet came into the chamber. He salaamed and produced a tablet which he handed to Costobarus.

Herewith, O my brother, I send thee one hundred talents. May it prove part of the corner-stone of a new Israel. Peace to thee and thine!

PHILIP OF TYRE.

Costobarus looked up at the old courier.

"Take my blessings to thy master. May he come to a high seat in that new Israel which he hath helped to build! Farewell."

The courier withdrew. When his footsteps died away the old merchant reached under the divan and drew forth the shittim-wood box. Producing a key he unlocked and opened it. From his bosom he drew forth the letter from Philadelphus and laid it within.

"Let her take it with her," he said, speaking aloud. "Here," lifting a cylinder of old silver exquisitely chased, "are her marriage papers; this," lifting delicately embroidered squares of linen, "her marriage tokens, and here, her dowry."

He opened the inner box and laid the sheepskin wallet in upon the gems. He closed the lid, and, locking the case, lifted it and set it beside him on the divan.

When he looked up, he saw a man standing within a few paces of him and perfunctorily gazing at anything but the display of Laodice's fortune.

He was lean, muscular, somewhat younger than forty but already gray at the temples, of nervous temperament, direct of gaze and of attractive presence. He wore a tunic of gray wool bordered with red, and a gray mantle hung negligently from his shoulders. Limbs and arms were bare and his head-covering of red wool hung from his arm.

Costobarus, a little discomfited that he had been surprised with Laodice's dowry exposed, spoke briskly.

"Well, Aquila? Prepared?"

"Everything is in order. I am ready to proceed at once."

"How many in your party?"

"But myself."

"Have you ever been to Jerusalem?"

"Never."

"How, then," Costobarus asked, with a keen look, "came Philadelphus to appoint you to conduct Laodice to the city?"

"His retinue is small; he could not come himself,

and he chose me as safer than the other member of his party," was the direct reply.

Costobarus studied this reply before he questioned his son-in-law's courier further.

"Jerusalem, they say, is in disorder. How will you get my daughter to shelter when you have reached the city?"

"Philadelphus hath instructed me that there will be a Greek at the Sun Gate daily, awaiting us. He will wear a purple turban embroidered with a golden star. He will conduct us to the house of Amaryllis the Seleucid, who is pledged to the Maccabee's cause. Philadelphus will be in her house."

"Why hers?" Costobarus persisted.

"Because it is the only secure house in Jerusalem. She stands in the good graces of John of Gischala and she is safe."

Costobarus ruminated.

"There is too much detail; too many people to depend upon and therefore too many who may fail you. Aquila!"

"Sir?"

"I am going to Jerusalem with you."

He turned without waiting to see the effect of this

speech upon the Maccabee's courier and clapped his hands for an attendant. To the servitor who responded he said:

"Send hither our party. It is time. Bring me my cloak."

He looked then suddenly at Aquila. The Roman's face had cleared of its astonishment and discomfiture.

"Well enough," the courier said bluntly and closed his lips. The servitor reappeared with his master's cloak and kerchief. After him came Keturah, the handmaiden, and Hiram, a camel-driver, prepared for a journey. The mute Momus presently appeared. Costobarus got into his cloak without help, made inquiry for this detail and that of his business and of his journey, gave instruction to his attendants, and then asked for Laodice.

There was a moment of silence more distressed than embarrassed. Momus dropped his eyes; Keturah looked at her master with moving lips and sudden flushing of color, as if she were on the point of tears. Aquila stared absently out of the arch beyond.

Costobarus glanced from one to the other of his company and then went toward the corridor to call

At her feet Hannah knelt.—*Page 29*

his daughter. As he lifted the curtain, he started and stopped.

The lifted curtain had revealed Laodice. At her feet Hannah knelt, as if she had flung herself in her daughter's path, her arms clasping the young figure close to her and an agony of appeal stamped on her upraised face. The last of the rich color had died out of the girl's face and with pitiful eyes and quivering lips she was stroking the desperate hands that meant to keep her for ever.

Except for the sudden sobbing of the woman servant, tense and anguished silence prevailed. The old merchant was confronted with a perplexity that found him without fortitude to solve. He felt his strength slip from him. He, too, covered his face with his hands.

At the opposite arch another house servant appeared, lifted a distorted, blackening face and, doubling like a wounded snake, fell upon the floor.

A moment of stupefied silence in which Hannah, with her mother instincts never so acutely alive, turned her strained vision upon the writhing figure. Then shrieks broke from the lips of the serving-

woman; the hall filled with panic. Hannah leaped to her feet and thrust Laodice toward her father.

"Away!" she cried. "The pestilence! The pestilence is upon us!"

CHAPTER II

ON THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM

News of the appearance of the plague in the house of Costobarus traveled fast after the death of the gardener, who had fallen in the open and in sight of the watchful inhabitants of Ascalon. So by the time the house servants of the merchant were made aware of their peril by the death of one of their own number, Philip of Tyre with the courage of affection and loyalty stood on the threshold of the guest-chamber informed of the situation and prepared to help. Hannah, supported by the Tyrian's assurance of her rescue and protection, succeeded in urging Costobarus and Laodice not to delay for her to the peril of the thrice precious daughter.

So with his house yet ringing with the first convulsion of terror Costobarus ordered his party with all haste to the camels.

Keturah, Laodice's handmaiden, had fainted with

terror and was carried parcel-wise over the great arm of Momus, the mute, out into the street and deposited summarily on the floor of Laodice's bamboo howdah. The camel-driver, Hiram, seemed only a little less stupefied than she. The mute, with a face as determined and threatening as an uplifted gad, drove him from the shelter of a dark corner out to his place on the neck of his master's camel. Aquila, the emissary, showed the immemorial composure in the face of disaster that was the badge of the Roman in the days of the degenerate Cæsars, and, mounting his horse when the rest of the party were in their places, headed the procession toward the northeast.

From an upper window behind a lattice, Hannah cried her farewells and fluttered her scarf. She was smiling the drawn, white smile of a mother who is forcing herself to be cheerful in the face of danger, for the peace of those she loves. Laodice understood the tender deception and when a sharp turn of the street cut off the sight of the plumy trees of the garden, she covered her face and wept inconsolably.

On either side of the passage there came muffled sounds from houses; out of open alleys leading into interior courts stole the fetor of death that even the

spice of burning unguents could not smother. The whole air shuddered with the drumming of heathen physicians in the pagan quarters, through which the silence of long stretches of ominously quiet houses shouted its meaning. At times frantic barefoot flights could be glimpsed as households deserted stricken houses, but whatever outcry arose came from bedsides. Ascalon fled as a frightened animal flees, silently and under cover.

They rode now through a shrieking wind, burdened with sallow smoke and dreadful odors. Denser and denser the cloud grew till the streets ahead were hidden in yellow vapor and near-by houses loomed with dim outlines as if far off, and even the sounds of death and disaster became choked in the immense prevalence of smell. Blinded, with scarf and kerchief wrapped over mouth and nostril, the fleeing party swept down upon the very heart of that stifling mystery. Through it presently, as the houses thinned out, they saw cores of great heat surmounted by black-tipped flames that crackled savagely. Momus, now in the lead, turned sharply to his right and the next instant had the wind behind him. Almost involuntarily each member of the party looked back. Outside the breach of the

broken wall, standing clear to view with the wind from the hills sweeping townward from them, were diabolical figures, naked and black, feeding immense pyres with hideous fuel.

Past this grisly line, a camel with a single rider swept in from seaward. The traveler lifted an arm and signaled to the party. Aquila seemed not to see this hail, and rode on; but Costobarus, after the traveler motioned to them once more, spoke:

"Does not this person make signs to us, Aquila?"

The pagan looked back.

"Why should he?" he asked.

"He can tell us," the master observed and spoke to Momus and Hiram, who drew up their camels. The traveler raced alongside.

It was a woman, veiled and wrapped with all the jealous care of the East against the curious eyes of strangers. Aquila took in her featureless presence with a single irritated look and apparently lost interest.

"Greeting, lady," Costobarus said.

"Peace, sir, and greeting," she replied respectfully. Her tones were marked with the deference of the serv-

ing-class and Costobarus gave her permission to speak.

"Art thou a Jew and master of this train?" she asked.

Costobarus assented.

"I was journeying to Jerusalem with a caravan of which my master was owner, but the Romans came upon us and took every one prisoner, except myself. I escaped, but I am without protection and without friends. In Jerusalem, I have relatives who will care for me, yet I fear to make the journey alone. I pray thee, with the generosity of a Jew and the authority of a master, permit me to go in the protection of thy company!"

Costobarus reflected and while he hesitated he became aware that Momus was looking at him with warning in his eyes. But Laodice, so filled with loneliness and apprehension, was moved to sympathy for the solitary and friendless woman. She leaned toward her father and said in a low voice:

"Let her come with us, father; she is a woman and afraid."

Aquila heard that low petition and he flashed a look

at the stranger that seemed reproachful. But Costobarus was speaking.

"Ride with us, then, and be welcome," he said.

The woman bowed her shawled head and murmured with emotion after a silence:

"The blessings of a servant be upon you and yours; may the God of Israel be with you for evermore."

She dropped back to the rear of the party and the train moved on.

Meanwhile, Keturah, who sat huddled on the floor of Laodice's howdah, had not moved since they had left the doorway of Costobarus' house. Momus, on the neck of Laodice's camel, had observed her once or twice, and now he reached back and touched her. He jerked his hand away and brought up his camel with a wrench. Hiram, following close behind, by dint of main strength managed to avoid a collision with Momus' beast so suddenly halted. The mute leaped down from his place and in an instant Costobarus joined him. Alarmed without understanding, Laodice had risen and was drawn as far as she might from the serving-woman. Momus, lifting himself by the stirrup, seized the stiff figure and laid it

down upon the sands. Aquila dismounted and the three men bent over the woman. Then Costobarus glanced up quickly at Laodice, made a sign to Momus, who, with a face devoid of expression, climbed back into his place on the neck of the camel.

The strange woman who had stood her ground was heard to say in a low voice, half lost in the muffling of her wrappings:

"One!"

Momus drove on leisurely and Laodice, knowing that she must not look, slipped down in her place and wrapped her vitta over her face.

Pestilence was riding with them.

After a long time, Costobarus' camel ambled up beside hers, and she ventured to uncover her eyes. Her father smiled at her with that same heart-breaking smile which her mother had for her in face of trouble.

"The frosts! The frosts!" he whispered to Momus, and the mute laid goad about his camel.

Aquila, seeing this haste, checked his horse's gait and fell back beside the strange woman. Together they permitted the rest of the party to ride ahead, while they talked in voices too restrained to be heard.

"There is pestilence in this company," Aquila said angrily; "will that not persuade you to abandon this plan?"

"No. When all of you are like to die and leave this great treasure sitting out in the wilderness without a guardian?" she said lightly. There was no trace of a servant's humility in her tone.

"Hast had the plague that thou seem'st to feel secure from it?" he demanded.

"O no; then there would be no risk in this game. There is no sport in an unfair advantage over conditions. No! But how comes this Costobarus with you?"

"He would not trust his daughter and a dowry to me, alone."

"How shall we get to Emmaus, then?" she asked.

"We shall not get to Emmaus; so you must inform Julian, who will expect us there," he declared.

The woman played with the silken reins of her camel. Behind her veil a sarcastic smile played about the corners of her mouth. Aquila watched her resentfully, waiting with an immense reserve of caustic words for her refusal to accept the charge.

"So, my Mars of the gray temples, thou meanest

in all faith to deliver up this lady and her treasure to Julian?"

"By those same gray temples, I do! And hold thy peace about my white hairs. Nothing made them so but thyself — and this evil plot in which I am tangled. What does Julian mean to do with this poor creature?"

"He has not got her yet and by the complication thou seest now, wearing its turban over one ear in yonder howdah, it may come to pass that he will never have her — and her dowry."

"Pfui! How little you know this Julian! Besides, I am pledged to deliver him — at least the treasure."

"And thou meanest to line his purse with this great treasure because he paid thee to do it?"

"I shall; and be rid of it!"

The woman smiled sarcastically.

"And scorn it for thyself?"

Aquila made no answer, but rode on in sulky silence.

"Perpol, it must be pleasant to be a queen," the woman observed with an assumption of childishness in her voice.

"Peril's own habit!" Aquila declared.

"Peril! Fie! That is half the pleasure of this game of life. It is tiresome to live any other way than hazardously."

"Thou shalt have pleasure enough in this journey thou art to take," Aquila declared a little threateningly.

The woman laughed. When Aquila spoke again, his voice was full of concern.

"I was a fool for not forcing you to stay in Ascalon. You are reckless —reckless!"

"It was that which made me attractive," the woman broke in, "to Nero, to Vitellius and to you."

"Reckless and useless!" Aquila went on decisively. "Hear me, now; I trifle no longer. Sometime tonight thou'lt leave us and journey to Emmaus and inform Julian what has wrecked his plans, and send him with despatch to Zorah. This thou wilt do, by all the Furies, or when I do catch thee as I shall, since there is no other fool in Judea who will undertake to feed thee, I shall leave the print of my displeasure on thee from thy head to thy heel! Mark me!"

The woman laughed aloud, with such peculiar insolence and amusement that one of the servants heard her and turned his head that way.

"Pah! What a timid villain thou art," the woman said, when the servant looked away again. "How much better it would have been had Julian fixed upon *me* as his confederate!"

"Not for Julian! You plot against him even now. But say what you will, you go to Emmaus to-night, without fail. I have spoken!"

Aquila touched his horse and riding away from the woman came up beside Costobarus who was gazing over the country through which they were passing.

It was a great plain, advancing by benches and slopes to the edge of a rocky shore. Without forests, spotted only with verdure, vast, barren, exhausted with the constant production of fourteen centuries, it was a cheerless sea-front at its best. To the west the wash of the tideless Mediterranean tumbled along an unindented coast; to the east the sallow stony earth went up and up, toward an ever receding sallow horizon. Between lay humbled towns, wholly abandoned to the bats and to the ignoble wild life of the Judean wilderness. There were no sheep or cattle. Vespasian had passed that way and required the flocks of the nation for the subsistence of his four legions. There were no olive or fig groves. They had been the first to fall

under the Roman ax, for the policy of Roman warfare was that the first step in subduing a rebellious province was to starve it. The vineyards had suffered the same end. The enriched soil of these inclosures, made one now with the wild at the leveling of their hedges, produced acres of profitless weeds, green against the rising brown bosom of the hill-fronts. Here and there were the fallen walls of isolated homes — wastes of masonry already losing all domestic signs. There were no gardens; it had been two seasons since the wheat and the barley had been reaped last, and the seaboard of southern Judea, in the path of Rome the destroyer, was a wilderness.

Over all this immense slope the eyes of Costobarus wandered. However he had felt in the preceding days when he looked upon this ruin of the land of milk and honey, he realized now suddenly and in all its fearful actuality the predicament of Judea, its despair and the gigantic travail before those who would save it from the united sentence passed upon it by God and the powers. Immense dejection seized him. He looked from the face of the country, upon which not a single thing of profit showed, toward the bowed head and oppressed figure of his young and inexperienced

daughter who was to put her tender self between Ruin and its victim. Chills, succeeded by flashes of fever, swept over him. He raised himself as if to give command to Aquila but settled back under the canopy, grown immeasurably older and feebler in that moment of helpless surrender to conditions of which he had been part an artificer. It was not as if he had made an incautious move in a political game; it was, as it seemed to him undeniably then, that he had advanced against the Lord God of Hosts, and there was no turning back!

He settled slowly into a stunned anguish that seemed to rise gradually, like a filling tide, shutting out the sunset and the seaboard, the bald earth and the streaming wind, and engulfing him in roaring darkness and intense cold.

They were in sight of a cluster of Syrian huts, the first inhabited village they had come upon since leaving Ascalon, but he was not aware of it. The sudden halting of his camel and a hoarse strained cry at hand seemed to bear some relation to his condition, but he did not care. He felt his howdah lurch to one side as some one leaped up beside him; he felt remotely the great grasp of hands on him, which must have been

Momus'; the quick military voice of Aquila he heard and then, keen and distinct as a call upon him, the sound of Laodice's tones made sharp with terror.

He opened his eyes and saw her, holding him in her arms. Somewhere in the background were the faces of Momus and Aquila. Between the pagan and the old servant passed a look that the old man caught. Then he heard Aquila say:

"The village — his sole chance, if there is a physician there."

Laodice held him fast only for a moment, when it seemed that she was wrenched away. The dying man was glad. If this were pestilence, she should not come near. The hiss of the lash and the bound of the stung camel disturbed him but he lapsed into the immense cold again as they raced down the slight declivity toward the Syrian village. But Pestilence was riding with them and the odds were with it.

But the dwellers of that little huddle of huts had nothing to do but to sit in their doorways and suspect. Whatever came their way from the sea for many months had brought them disaster and long since they had learned to defend themselves. So now, when a party riding at breakneck speed, bearing with them

an old man on whom the inertia of death was plain, came across the frontiers of their little town, they met them with the convenient stones of their rocky streets, with their savage, stark-ribbed dogs, with offal from kitchen heap and donkey stall and with insults and curses.

"Away, ye bringers of plague! Out, lepers; be gone, ye unclean!"

Laodice and Aquila who rode in the open were fair targets for half the hail that fell about them. The girl groaned as the missiles fell into the howdah upon the helpless shape of Costobarus, who did not lift a hand to fend off the stones. The pagan, bruised and raging, drew his weapon and spurred his horse to ride down his assailants, but they scattered before him and from safe refuge continued their assault with redoubled determination.

Momus, seeing only injury in attempting to enforce hospitality, turned his camel and, swinging around the outermost limits of the settlement, fled. Aquila followed him, and a moment later the rest of the party joined them.

Without the range of the village, the party halted. Momus and Aquila lifted Costobarus down and laid

him on a rug that Laodice had spread for him. But when she would have knelt by him, he motioned to Aquila not to permit her to approach. The mute stood by his master. In that countenance fast passing under shade was written charge and injunction as solemn as the darkness that approached him.

"Here, O faithful servant, is the wife of a prince, the daughter of thy master, the joy of thine own declining days. Shield her against wrong and misfortune by all the strength that in thee lies, as thou hopest in the King to come and the reward of the steadfast. Promise!"

They were silent lips that once knew the art and the sound of speech. The old habit never entirely fell away from them. Under this anguish they moved — fruitlessly; over the deformed face flitted the keen agony of regret; then he lifted his great left arm and bent it upward at the elbow; the huge, even monstrous muscles, knotted and kinked from shoulder to elbow, sank down under the broad barbarian bracelet of bronze and rippled under and rose again from elbow to wrist, ferocious, superhuman! In that movement the dying man read the mute's consecration of his one great strength to the protection of

the tenderly loved Laodice. Costobarus motioned to the shittim-wood casket and Momus undid it and strapped it on his own belt.

"The frosts! The frosts!" the dying man whispered. The mute understood. Then the father's eyes wandered toward the figure of his daughter fended away from him by the pagan. The agony of her suffering and the agony of his distress for her bridged the space between them. And while they yearned toward each other in a silence that quivered with pain, the light darkened in Costobarus' eyes.

When Laodice came to herself, she was laid upon a spot of rough grass, in the shelter of an overhanging bluff. It was not the scene upon which her sorrow-stunned eyes had closed a while before. The village was nowhere in sight; the plain had been left behind; any further view was shut off by Aquila's horse, and the two camels whose bridles were in the hands of Hiram. Beside the stricken girl knelt Momus and Aquila; standing at her feet was a newcomer, on whom her wandering and half-conscious gaze rested.

He was an old man, clad in a short tunic, ragged of hem and girt about him with a rope. Barefoot,

bareheaded and provided only with a staff and a small wallet, he was to outward appearances little more than one of the legion of mendicants that infested the poverty-stricken land of Judea. But his large eyes, under the tangle of wind-blown white hair and white shelving brows, were infinitely intelligent and refined. Now, they beamed with pity and concern on the bereaved girl.

But she forgot him the next instant, for returning consciousness brought back like a blow the memory of the death of her father.

From time to time she caught snatches of conversation between the old wayfarer and Aquila. They were spoken in low tones and only from time to time did they reach her.

"He was Costobarus, principal merchant of this coast," she heard Aquila explain shortly.

"I shall go on to Ascalon; I do not fear," the old man said next. "I shall bring his people to fetch his body. I marked the spot. Comfort her with that, when she can bear to talk of it."

"We go to Jerusalem," Aquila went on, some time later, "else we should turn back with him ourselves. But we dare not risk the pestilence on her account, for

it seems that she is very necessary to the Jews at this hour — very necessary."

"I follow to the Holy City," the old wayfarer added at last. "The Passover is celebrated there within two weeks. But I shall not fail; nothing will harm me."

"What talisman do you carry to protect you?" the pagan asked a little irritably.

"No talisman, but the love of Jesus Christ, the Saviour!"

"A Christian!" Aquila exclaimed.

Even through her stupor of grief and hopelessness, Laodice heard this exclamation. Here, then, was one of the Nazarenes, that mysterious sect whose tenets she had never been permitted to hear. But also, she knew that the old apostate had braved the plague and had buried her father. She turned to look at him in time to see him extend his hands in blessing over her.

"*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and his comfort be with you, for ever; amen.* Farewell."

He was gone. Momus raised her in his arms and, lifting her into her howdah, laid her tenderly on the improvised reclining seat that had been made of the

chair therein. In a twinkling the whole party had mounted, and passed swiftly on toward Jerusalem. As they moved forward, the strange woman murmured softly:

"Two!"

Laodice's camel mounted the slope toward the east and stretched away on a comparative level toward an immense white moon. Aquila's horse kept up with the matchless speed of the tall camel only at times, and Laodice, dully sensing that they were going at hot haste, realized that a race was on between them and the pestilence. Momus was wielding the goad for a run to the frosts.

A camel raced up beside Aquila.

"Look!" the woman said to him in a lowered tone, showing back over the road by which they had come. Aquila turned in his saddle and looked. Momus rose in his seat and looked. Behind them only one camel rocked along in their wake. The other and its driver had disappeared.

"Deserted!" Aquila exclaimed under his breath.

"Three!" the woman said.

"A pest on your counting for a Charon's toll-

taker!" Aquila whispered savagely. "We will have no more of it!"

"No?" the woman said with a meaning that made the pagan shiver.

Momus laid goad about his camel.

The way continually ascended toward the east; the soil was no longer sandy, but rocky; no longer given up to desolate gardens, but black with groves of cedars and highland shrubs. They swung off a plateau that would have ended in a cliff, down a shaly sheep-path into a wady. Under the moonlight, the bottom was seen to be scarred with marks of hoof and wheel. It debouched suddenly into a Roman road, straight, level, magnificently built and running as a bird flies on to Jerusalem.

The camel's gait increased. Momus settled himself in a securer position and Laodice, careless of the outcome of this breathless hurry, yielded herself to the careen of her howdah. At times, her indifferent vision caught, through moonlit notches and gaps, glimpses of great blue vapors, crowned with pale fire and piled in glorious disorder low on the eastern horizon. They were the hills encompassing Jeru-

salem. The stream of wind on her face cooled and drove stronger.

Aquila rode closer to her, his horse panting under the effort. His face looked strange and distressed.

"Lady," he said in low tones, "necessity forces me to speak to you in your grief; do not blame me for indifference to your desire to be alone. But we must care for you, though in your heart this moment you may resent a wish to live. But your father commanded me!"

She gave him attention.

"Let us not carry peril with us," he added in a half-whisper. "Let us not carry food for pestilence with us."

"I do not understand," she answered, adopting his low tone.

"The more we are, the more of us to die. You must live; I must live," he explained, nodding toward Momus.

After a little silence, she asked:

"Do we not ride toward the frosts?"

"Yes; but even now pestilence may ride on beside us — your servant and this woman. Let us save ourselves."

"Abandon them?" she questioned.

"Lest they go on without us," he added.

Momus turned suddenly and gazed at Aquila. Then he imperiously signed the pagan to fall back.

They rode on.

The pagan slackened his horse's gallop and reined in beside the woman. They talked together, argumentatively, for a single tense minute and then Aquila, with a bitter word, put spurs to his animal and dashed up beside Laodice's camel. In his one uplifted hand a knife gleamed. The other reached toward the casket bound to Momus' hip. Laodice, raised to an upright attitude in her fresh fright, saw that his face was black and twisted and that he wavered stiffly in his saddle.

But the mute did not await the attack. He seized the pagan's outstretched hands with that monstrous left and flung him backward. Without an effort to save himself, falling rigidly and with a strange cry, Aquila dropped back over his horse's crupper into the dust of the road.

"Momus!" Laodice screamed.

Back of her the woman cried out:

"On! On! It is the pestilence!"

Momus wielded his goad. Laodice, shaking and crying aloud, looked back to see the strange woman swerve her camel past the dark shape lying with out-flung arms in the road and sweep quickly on after them.

The scourge had overtaken Aquila.

All night the camels fled east, all night the soft footfall of the woman's beast pursued them; all night the wind freshened until Laodice's bared face stiffened with the cold and the breath of the mute that sat upon her camel's neck steamed in the moonlight. Up and up, by steep and winding wadies they mounted; under overhanging cliffs and past bald towers of hill-rock staring white in the moon, along black passes between brooding eminences of solid night, crowned with ghost-light; over high plateaus darkened with groves, down dales with singing, invisible streams running seaward and up again and on until the hills engulfed them wholly and those before were higher than any they had seen. Then their flying beasts, leaving the Roman road over which they had sped for some distance, followed a sheep-path and burst into an open immersed in moonlight. Below

in the distance was a cluster of huts, white and lifeless. But abroad, over the crisp grass and misty white on all the exposed slopes, sparkled the deep hoar frost!

CHAPTER III

THE SHEPHERD OF PELLA

Momus drew up his camel. The woman who had followed halted. Except for the hurried breathing of their beasts, a critical silence brooded over the moon-silvered wilderness. The moment was tense with the agony of human bitterness against the immitigable despatch of death. There could be no thanksgiving for their own safety from those who were not glad to be given life. Laodice resented her preservation; old Momus, aside from the wound of personal loss sore in his heart, was stricken with the realization of the grief of his young mistress, which he could not help. He did not raise his eyes to her face when he turned toward her; there was no speech. In the young woman's heart the pain was too great for her to venture expression safely. The silence was poignant with unnatural restraint.

Presently Momus inquired of her by signs if she wished to go on to the lifeless village below the camp. She did not observe his gestures, and Momus decided for her. He drove on and the woman, who had wrapped her cloak about her as the biting wind of the hills heightened through the narrow defiles to the north, followed.

But almost the next instant Momus drew up his mount so suddenly that Laodice was roused. He turned and began to make rapid signs. Laodice half rose as she read them and pressed her hands together.

"Seven days!" she exclaimed in dismay. There was silence.

Momus made the camel kneel. He dismounted slowly, and began to undo the tent-cloth in a roll beside the howdah. The woman rode up and instantly the mute stepped between her and his young mistress and went on with his work.

Laodice understood the question in the woman's attitude although, with true sense of an inferior's place, the stranger did not speak.

"We are unclean," Laodice said with effort. "We have come from a pestilential city and we have touched

the dead. We can not enter a town with these defilements upon us, except to present ourselves to a priest for examination and separation. Furthermore, we must burn our unessential belongings. If you are a Jewess all these things are known to you."

The woman extended her hands, palms upward, with a grace that was almost dainty.

"Lady," she said behind her unlifted veil, "I am an unlettered woman and have been accustomed to the instruction of my masters. I am obedient to the laws of our people."

"You would have been in less peril to have ridden alone," Laodice sighed. "Our company has been no help to you."

"We can not say that confidently. There are worse things than pestilence in the wilderness," the woman replied.

Momus seemed to observe more confidence than was natural in the ready answers of this professed servant, and before he would leave Laodice to pitch camp, he helped her to alight and drew her with him. The woman remained on her mount.

Gathering up sticks, dead needles of cedar and last year's leaves, he made a fire upon which he heaped

fuel till it lighted up the near-by slopes of the hills and roared jovially in the broad wind.

It was a pocket in the heart of high hills into which they had fled. The bold, sure line of a Roman road divided it, cutting tyrannically through the cowed hovels of the town as an arrow drives through a flock of pigeons. On either side were the dim shapes of great rocks and semi-recumbent cedars. Retiring into shadow were the darker outlines of the surrounding circle of hills, rived by intervals of black night where wadies entered. From their summits the flying arch of the heavens sprang, printed with a few faint stars, but all silvered with the flood-light of a moon cold and pure as the frost itself. It was unsympathetic, aloof and wild — a cold place into which to bring broken hearts to assume banishment from the comfort and companionship of mankind.

Laodice slowly and with effort began to separate those belongings which were to be laid upon the fire from those which were too necessary to be burned. The woman alighted but, on offering to assist, was warned away from the girl with a menacing gesture of Momus' great arm. The stranger drew herself up suddenly with a wrath that she hardly controlled

but came no nearer Laodice. When the girl finally finished her selection, the woman begged permission to attend to the camels and getting the beasts on their feet led them together to be tethered.

Laodice, assisted by Momus, took up the condemned supplies and flung them one at a time upon the roaring fire. Little by little, with growing reluctance, the heap of spare belongings was examined and condemned, until finally only the garments they wore, the tents that were to shelter them and the essential harness of the camels were left. Then Momus drew from his wallet a fragment of aromatic gum and cast it on the blaze. While it ignited and burned with great vapors of penetrating incense, he unstrapped the precious casket, set it down between his feet, stripped off his comfortable woolen tunic and passed it through the volumes of white smoke piling up from the fire.

And while he stood thus a deft hand seized the casket from behind. There was a sharp, warning cry from Laodice. The old man staggered only a moment from the tripping that the wrench gave him, but in that instant of hesitation the pillager vanished.

The old mute shouted the infuriated, half-animal yell of the dumb and started in pursuit, but at his second step he saw the fleeter camel swing down the declivity, at top-speed, with the other trailing with difficulty at full length of its bridle behind. The next instant the muffled beat of the padded hooves drummed the solid bed of the Roman road, and the shapes of camels and fugitive were lost in blue darkness beyond the town.

There was no need for the pair left behind to await a realization of all that the loss meant to them. One running swiftly as a fine young creature can run when spurred by desperation, and the other, lamely but doggedly, as an old determined man, rushed down the rough side of the slope, leaped into the roadway and ran irrationally after the fugitive mounted upon a camel, fleeter than the fastest horse.

Momus saw with fear that Laodice on this straight inviting road would out-distance him to her peril. He shouted inarticulately after her, but her reply came back, high with desperation and terror.

"The corner-stone of Israel! All his treasure! God's portion, lost, lost!"

She was out of his sight. The sudden barking of

dogs told him that she had crossed the outskirts of the village, and groaning with alarm for her the old man stumbled on after her. He saw lights flash out; heard shouts, and out of the confusion distinguished Laodice's, vehement and urging. The yapping of the town curs became less threatening and, by the time Momus reached the settlement, half-dressed Jews were hurrying east out of the village after the flying feet of the girl, in pursuit of the robber.

For unmeasured time, while the moon crossed its meridian and sloped down the west, the search continued. Momus did not overtake the fleet-footed party that preceded him. Stragglers that lost interest dropped back with him from time to time; but finding him dumb and immensely distressed, they disappeared eventually and returned to the town. One by one, at times by twos and threes the party dropped off. The three or four who remained helpful continued against hope, for simple pity for the girl. But when she dropped suddenly by the wayside, exhausted with the strain of many troubles, they stopped to tell her that the chase was fruitless and to offer their rough condolences.

Then Momus hobbled up to them. Laodice refused to raise her head to listen to them and they turned to the old man. But by signs, he showed them that his tongue was dead, and finally, with suppressed remarks upon the exceeding misfortune of the pair, they, too, disappeared. A thoughtful one invited them to return to the village. Laodice, careless now of what he should think of his exposure to pestilence, told him bluntly that they were unclean. Hastily he exclaimed at the sum of their troubles, hastily blessed them, and hastily departed.

There was a pallor along the under-rim of the east; the wind freshened with the sweet vigor of early morning.

Over the stunned silence came the sound of the infinite trotting of tiny hooves and a high, wild, youthful yell. Laodice, too worn to observe, sat still; but Momus, with a rush of old fairy-tales in mind, sprang to her side and seized her arm. His alarmed eyes searched the dark landscape for whatever visitation it had to reveal.

There was the rush of countless hoof-beats and a low cloud of dust obscured the crest of the hill just above them. The soft tremolo of multitudinous

bleating came out of it. The quick excited bark of a fresh Natolian sheep-dog wakened an echo in one of the ravines through a hill on the opposite side of the road, while strong and insistent and happy the young cry preceded this sudden animation in the wilderness.

There was a fall of gravel on the slope over their heads and the next instant a fourteen-year-old boy descended upon the pair in a fall of earth, his sandaled feet planted one ahead of the other, his bare arms thrown above his head as he balanced himself, his long, stiff, crinkled black locks blowing backward, his face bright with the eager enjoyment of his simple feat.

After him came a veritable avalanche of Syrian sheep, scrambling to right and left as they parted behind Momus and Laodice and eddying around the young shepherd who stopped at seeing the pair. His yell died away at once, though the effort of sliding down a frozen, rocky slope had not interfered with a single note.

He might well have been a young satyr, fresh from the groves of Achaia, with his big, serious mouth and its range of glittering teeth, his shining deer-

like eyes, wide apart, his faun curls low on his forehead, his big head set on a short neck, his shoulders yet childish, his slim brown body half smothered in skins, half bare as he was born, his large hard hand gripping a crook of horn and wood. His gaze at Momus was frank with boyish curiosity. His bright eyes plainly remarked on the oddity of the old servant's appearance. Having catalogued old Momus as worthy of further inspection, he looked then at Laodice. Under the lowering moon and the listless effort of coming day, her unmantled dress of silver tissue made of her a moon-spirit, banished out of her world of pallor and solitude. Before her splendid young beauty, pale with distress and weariness, he was not abashed. His simple eyes studied her with equal frankness, but with an admiration beyond words.

Feeling somehow that his sudden appearance might have distressed her, he said finally:

"Go on, lady, or stay as it pleases you. I will not hurt you."

Momus' shoulders submerged his ears in an indignant shrug. That this young calf of the pastures should insure him safe passage!

But Laodice was still filled with the calamity of her loss.

"Hast seen a robber, here, along this road?" she asked.

"Many of them," was the prompt answer.

"With a chest of jewels?"

The boy shook his head.

"I never examined their booty," he said with perfect respect.

"Or then a woman riding one camel and leading another?"

"Never anything like that."

Laodice, with this hope gone, let her face fall into her hands.

"His fortune given freely to Israel," she groaned. "His whole life's ambition reduced to material form for the help of his brethren — gone, gone!"

The shepherd grew instantly distressed. He looked at Momus and asked in a whisper what had happened. But the old servant signed to his lips irritably, and stroked his young mistress' hair in a dumb effort to comfort her. The silence grew painful. In his anxiety to relieve them, he bethought him of their uncovered heads and houseless state.

"Do you live in the village; or do you camp near by?"

Momus shook his head. Laodice appreciated the boy's concern for them but could not make an attempt to explain.

"Then," he offered promptly, "come have my fire and my rock. It is the best rock in all these hills; and my tent," he added, showing the skins that wrapped him. "I wear my tent; it saves my carrying it. Indeed I do not need it; you may have it. Come!"

He spoke hurriedly, as if he would thrust his desire to comfort between her and the wave of disconsolation that he felt was about to cover her.

Old Momus, sensibly accepting the boy's suggestion as the wisest course, raised Laodice and motioning the shepherd to lead on, led his young mistress up the hill as the boy retraced his steps. The flood of Syrian sheep turned back with him and followed bleating between the urging of the sheep-dog, as the boy climbed.

On a slope to the west as a wady bent upon itself abruptly before it debouched upon the hillside, there was a deep glow illuminating a space in the depres-

sion. The shepherd dropped down out of sight. His voice came over the shuffle and bleat of the sheep.

"Follow me; this is my house."

Momus led his mistress over to the wady. There the shepherd with uplifted hands helped her down with the superior courtesy of a householder offering hospitality. There was a red circle of fire in the sandy bottom of the dry wady, and beside it was a flat boulder at the foot of which were prints of the shepherd's sandals and, on the bank behind it, the mark where his shoulders had comfortably rested. He made no apology for the poverty of his entertainment; he had never known anything better.

"Now, brother," he said busily to Momus, "if thou'lt lend me of thy height, thou shalt have of my agility and we will set up a douar for the lady."

With frank composure he stripped off the burden of skins that covered him until he stood forth in a single hide of wool, with a tumble of sheep pelts at his feet. In each one was a thorn preserved for use and with these he pinned them all together, scrambled out on the bank, emitting his startling cry at the sheep that obstructed his path. From above he shouted down to Momus.

"Stretch it, brother, over thy head. I shall pin it down with stones on either side. Now, unless some jackal dislodges these weights before morning, ye will be safe covered from the cold. There! God never made a man till He prepared him a cave to sleep under! I've never slept in the open, yet. How is it with thee now, lady?"

He was down again before her with the red light of the great bed of coals illuminating him with a glow that was almost an expression of his charity.

She saw that he had the straight serious features of the Ishmaelite, but lacked the fierce yet wondering gaze of the Arab. Aside from these superior indications in his face there was nothing to separate him from any other shepherd that ranged the mountainous pastures of Palestine.

She, who all her life had never known anything but to expect the tenderest of ministrations, was humbly surprised and grateful at the free-handed generosity of the young stranger. Momus looked at him with grudging approval.

"It is kindly shelter," she said finally with effort, "and it is warm. You are very good to us!"

"But you have not eaten of my salt," he declared.

Momus showed interest. It had been long since the last meal in the luxurious house of Costobarus. The boy in the meantime produced unleavened loaves from the carry-all of sheepskin that hung over his shoulders, and without explanation disappeared among his flock. Presently he returned with a small skin of milk.

"We have goats in the flock," he said. "A shepherd can not live without a goat. You do not know about shepherds," he added.

Laodice thought that she detected tactful inquiry in his last remark and roused herself painfully to make due explanations to her host. But he waved his hands at her, with the desert-man's courtesy which covers fine points better than the greater ones.

"Eat my fare; I do not purchase thy history with salt and shelter," he said, with a certain sublimity of honor.

Momus ate, and looked with growing grace at his young host. But Laodice succeeded only in drinking the goat's milk and lapsed into benumbed gazing at the red glow of fire that cast its warmth about her. The shepherd talked on, attempting to interest her in something other than her consuming sorrow.

"These be Christian sheep about you, friends," he said, "and I am a Christian shepherd."

Momus sat up suddenly with a bit of the boy's bread arrested on its way to his lips. He was eating the fare of an apostate, of a despised Nazarene. The boy went on composedly.

"We are from Pella, the Christian city. We are, my sheep, my city and I, the only secure people in all Judea. We, I and the sheep, have been in the hills since the first new grass in February. We are many leagues from home."

"So am I," Laodice said wearily.

"Jerusalem?" the shepherd asked, glad he had brought out a response. "No? Yet all Judea is going to Jerusalem at this time. Are you fugitives?"

Momus nodded.

"Come then to Pella," the shepherd urged. "You will be fed there; Titus will not come there. We are poor but we are happy — and we are safe."

Laodice thanked him so inertly that he sensed her disinterest, and while he sat looking at her, searching his heart for something kind to say, she put out her hand impulsively and took his.

"God keep thee and forget thy heresy," she said. "If thou livest in Pella, Pella is indeed happy."

He laughed with a flush stealing up under the brown of his cheeks. A faint light came into Laodice's eyes as she looked at him; he returned her gaze with a gradual softening that was intensely complimentary. Between the two was effected instant and lasting fellowship. Before Momus' indignant eyes the shepherd was blushing happily.

"Who art thou?" Laodice asked.

"They call me Joseph, son of Thomas."

After a silence she said softly,

"I am not at liberty to tell my name." She remembered the secrecy of Philadelphus' mission. "Yet perchance if the God of my fathers prosper me and my husband, I may come to Pella — as thy queen."

The boy's eyes brightened and he drew in a sharp breath, but almost instantly the animation died and he looked at her sorrowfully. It seemed that she read dissent and sympathy commingled in his gaze. But he was a Christian; he could not believe and hope as she hoped.

"Can I do aught for you?" he asked disjointedly.

"Our duty is rather toward you, child," she answered, suddenly arousing to the peril they might bring their free-handed host. "We have newly come from a country where there is pestilence."

But he smiled down on her uplifted face, with immense confidence.

"I am not afraid. Besides, if I perish giving you comfort, I have done only as Jesus would have me do."

"Who is Jesus?" Laodice asked.

The shepherd made a little sign and bent his knee.

"The Christ!" he responded.

Momus plucked quickly at Laodice's sleeve and shook his head at her in an admonitory manner. He had laid down his bread unfinished. But the shepherd looked at him sympathetically.

"Never fear," he said. "It will not hurt her to hear about Him. He makes Pella safe from armies. Let her come there and see for herself."

Laodice pressed his hand.

"I shall come," she said.

He heaved a contented sigh — contented with himself, contented with her promise to come. Then he drew his hands away.

"The sheep are noisy; they will not let you sleep. We shall go." Then as if afraid of her thanks he drew away, and halted at the threshold of the shelter. Then the boy extended his hands with a gesture so solemn that both of his guests bowed their heads instinctively.

"*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you for evermore.* Farewell," he said in a half-whisper.

He was gone.

Presently the rush of little feet swept after him and his high, wild, youthful yell rang faintly in the distance. The delicate crackling from the heated bed of coals was all that was heard in the sheltered wady roofed with skins.

For the second time within the past few hours, Laodice had met a Christian. Both had helped her; both had blessed her. And one was an old man and one was a child.

The interest of the recent interview and the excitement of the night slowly died away, leaving Laodice in the dead hopelessness of weary despair. She lay down suddenly with her face against the warmed sand and wept. Momus sat down beside her, covered her with a leopard skin taken from his own swarthy shoul-

ders, and soothed her with awkward touches on cheek and hair, till her tears exhausted her and she slept.

Stealthily then the old man rolled up her own mantle and put it under her head and prepared to watch. And then as he sat with his knee drawn up, his head bowed upon it, the weakness of slumber gradually stole away his watchfulness and his concern.

Some time later, before the deliberate dawn of a March day had put out the last of the greater stars, two men on horses descended the declivity just above the shelter of sheepskins and attracted by the dull glow of the fire drew up cautiously.

At a word from one of the men, the other alighted and, peering from the shelter of a prostrate cedar, inspected the pair. After assuring himself that there were but two about the camp, one a woman and both asleep, he tiptoed back to his fellow.

"Only a man and a woman," he said. "Jews on their way to the Passover. Their fire is almost out. Let us ride on."

"What haste!" the one who had kept his saddle said. "One would think it were you going forward to meet a bride and her dowry! I am hungry. Let us borrow of this fire and get breakfast."

"Emmaus is only a little farther on," the first man protested. "I am tired of wayside meals, Philadelphus. I would eat at a khan again before I forget the custom."

"How is the pair favored?" the other said provokingly.

"I did not approach near enough," the other retorted. "It seemed to be an old man and a girl."

"Pretty?" the one called Philadelphus asked.

"I did not see."

"Married, Julian?"

"How could I tell?" Julian flared.

Philadelphus laughed, and dismounted.

"I shall see for myself," he declared, walking over to the sheltering cedar to look.

Julian followed him nervously, saying under his breath:

"You waste time deliberately!"

"Tut! You merely wish to keep me from seeing this girl," Philadelphus retorted.

He, too, stopped at the prostrate cedar and gazed under the sagging shelter of skins.

"Shade of Helen!" he exclaimed under his breath

as the firelight gave him perfect view of the sleeping girl. "What have we here?"

Julian made no response. He drew nearer and looked in silence.

"Now what are they to each other?" Philadelphus continued. "Father and daughter; lady and servant or — a courtezan and her manager?"

At the continued silence of his companion, he argued his question himself.

"No such ill-fashioned peasant loins as his ever begat such sweet patrician perfection as that!" he declared. "And a lady rich enough to have one servant would travel with more than one or not at all —"

Julian broke in with sudden avid interest.

"Look at that deal of feminine flummery — that dress of silver tissue, the ends of that silken scarf you see below the covering — all those jewels and trinkets! Odd garb for travel afoot, is it not? It is a badge not to be put off even in as barren a market as this. She is going to Jerusalem for the Passover. He will carry the purse, however, mark me."

"How well you know the marks of delinquency!"

Philadelphus said with a glimmer of resentment in his eyes.

"Who does not? What do the Jewish psalmists and proverbialists and purists depict so minutely as that migrating iniquity, the strange woman?"

"But look at her!" Philadelphus insisted. "I have not seen anything so bewitching since I left Ephesus!"

"No; nor a long time before!" Julian declared. "I must have a nearer look."

"Careful! You will wake her!"

Julian's face showed a sneer at his companion's concern.

"I'll have a care not to wake the old Bœotian," he said.

He stepped between Laodice and her sleeping servant. The mute with the stupor of slumber further to disable his dulled hearing, did not move.

"Young!" Philadelphus exclaimed in a whisper. "And new to the life!"

"Pfui!" Julian scoffed. "Sleep makes even Venus look innocent!"

"Then this is the most innocent wickedness I have seen in months!"

"So you catalogue innocence as a charm! It's not here. But if she had no beauty but that eyelash I'd be speared upon it!"

Philadelphus turned toward the old servant plunged in the exhausted sleep of weary age.

"Thou grizzled nightmare!" he exclaimed vindictively.

He glanced again at the girl. Julian had knelt beside her. Between the two men passed a look that was mutually understood.

"Remember," Julian whispered, "you are a married man."

Philadelphus paled suddenly with anger as the intent of his companion dawned upon him, but he put off his temper shrewdly.

"And so approaching a time when wayside beauties will no longer be free to me," he said, cutting off his fellow in the beginning of his preëmption. "And you have a long freedom before you."

There was so much challenge in his manner that Julian accepted it. He reached into his tunic and drew forth a pair of dice.

"We will play for her," he said.

The Maccabee put the tesserae aside.

"We will not use them," he said. "I know them to be cogged. Let us have the judgment of a coin."

A bronze coin of Agrippa was produced. Julian in getting at his purse brushed against the sleeping girl and as the pair glanced at her before they tossed, her large eyes opened full in Julian's face. A moment, almost breathless for the two, and terror flared up in her eyes. She started up, but Julian's hand dropped on her.

"Peace, Phryne!" he said.

She shrank from his touch, literally into the arms upon which Philadelphus rested his weight. She looked up into his eyes, and saw them soften with a smile, and moved no farther. Philadelphus took the coin.

"Let Vespasian decide for me," he said.

"For me Fortunatus," said Julian.

Philadelphus filliped the coin and flung out a strong and fending hand against his fellow covering it. Under the brightening day, the lowering profile of the old plebeian emperor Vespasian showed distinctly on the newly minted bronze.

Julian made a sharp menacing sound, and with clenched hands rose on his knees. But Philadelphus

looked at him steadily, half-amused at the implied threat, half-inviting its fulfilment, and under his gaze, Julian rose slowly and drew away. Philadelphus tossed the coin after him. His cousin picked it up and put it in his purse.

Philadelphus looked down at his prize.

She had not flinched from him when she had found him beside her, with Julian threatening her. But now her wide open eyes fixed upon his brimmed with an agony of appeal. Innocent of the world's wickedness, she could only sense supreme peril in this mysterious game without understanding the stake. Momus was not in sight — dead for all she knew — and the desert was an ally against her. Over her, now, bent a face characteristic of a great spirit, yet one which was coeval with the times — times of violence and the supremacy of force. His lips were thin, the contour of his face angular at the jaw, the nose straight and long, his brows black and low over dark blue eyes of a fathomless depth, the forehead strongly molded, and marked with deep perpendicular lines between the eyes. He was dark, heavy-haired, young, lean, broad and of fine height even as he knelt beside her. Laodice did not note any of these

things. She was only conscious of the immense power her terror and her helplessness had to combat. Back of all this iron selfishness, she hoped that somewhere was a gentleness, even if inert and useless. All her strength was concentrated in the effort to bring it to life.

He gazed at her, apparently unconscious of the desperation in the face lifted to him. The slow smile that presently grew again in his eyes was none the less unthoughted. He slipped his hand under a strand of her rich hair that had fallen and drew it out, slowly, at full length. Slowly his eyes followed it as inch by inch it slipped through his fingers. Old memories seemed to struggle to the surface; old tendernesses; recollection of pure hours and holy things; paganism dropped from him like a husk and the spiritual hauteur of a Jew brought the expression of the unhumbled house of Judah into his face. Through a notch in the hills a golden beam shot from the sun and penetrating this inwalled valley lay like an illuminating fire on the man's face and glorified it. Laodice's breath stopped.

Slowly his fingers slipped along the fine silken length of that shining strand until his arm extended

to the full; and the end of the lock yet rested on her breast. Thus might have been the hair of that Rahab, who was no less a patriot because she was frail; thus, the hair of Bathsheba, who was the mother of the wisest Israelite though she sinned; thus the hair of that mother of Samson, who slew armies single-handed! Badge of Judah, mark of the haughty strength of the oldest enlightenment in the world! He would not initiate his succor of Israel with violence against its purest type.

He smiled slowly; slowly let the strand fall through his fingers. He looked into her eyes and she saw a sudden light immeasurably compassionate and tender grow there. A weakness swept over her; she felt that she had been longing for that light. Then he rose quickly and moved away.

Old Momus, the mute, with his head on his knees slept on.

Julian, who had been halted involuntarily by the attitude of his companion and had been an amazed witness of this extraordinary end of the incident, looked at Philadelphus' face in frank stupefaction. But Philadelphus laid a hand so forceful and compelling on his companion's shoulder that it left the

pink print of his fingers on the flesh, turned him toward the horses and led him away.

"We will breakfast farther on," he said.

A moment and they were swinging down the stony side of the hill toward the east, and Laodice, with her hand clutching her excited heart, had not thought of flinging herself upon Momus. She raised herself gradually to watch them as far as she could see, and her fixed and stunned gaze rested with immense homesickness and longing on the taller man radiant against the background of a risen sun.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAVELERS

The Maccabee rode on, unconscious of Julian's critical gaze. The smile on his lips flickered now brightly, now very faint. The incident in the hills had not made him entirely happy, but it had awakened in him something which was latent in him, something which he had never felt before, but which held a sweet familiarity that the blood of his fathers in him had recognized.

Julian was intensely disgusted and disappointed. But there was still a sensation of shock on his shoulder where the Maccabee's iron hand had rested and his famous caution stood him in stead at this moment when a quarrel with such intense and executive earnestness in his companion's manner might prove disastrous. If quarrel they must before they reached Emmaus, now but a few leagues east of them, he must insure himself against defeat much less likely

to be suffered from a man reluctant to quarrel. He had been hunting for a pretext ever since they had left Cæsarea, but this one, suddenly opened to him, startled him. He admitted now that it would not be wise to force a fight. Whatever must be done should be done with least danger to himself. It were better, he believed, to allay suspicion.

He spoke.

"How far is it to Jerusalem?"

"About eighty furlongs."

"Then if we continue, we shall approach the gates after nightfall."

"We shall not continue," Philadelphus remarked. "We shall halt at Emmaus."

"Do you think it would be better for us to camp here in the hills rather than to stop without the walls of Jerusalem between the city forces and the winter garrison of Titus and await the opening of the Gates?" Julian asked after thought.

"We shall wait in Emmaus," the Maccabee repeated, his soul too filled with dream to note the change in his companion's manner.

"You have already lost three days," Julian charged him irritably.

"Jerusalem may be besieged; it may be long before I can ride in the wilderness again," the Maccabee answered.

"Right; your next journey through this place may be afoot — at the end of a chain," Julian averred.

The Maccabee raised his brows.

"Losing courage at the last end of the journey?" he inquired.

"No! I never have believed in this project," Julian declared.

"Why?"

"Who believes in the prospects of a man determined to leap into Hades?"

But the Maccabee was already riding on with his head lifted, his eyes set upon the blue shadows on the western slopes of hills, lifted against the early morning sun. Julian went on.

"You go, cousin, on a mission mad enough to measure up with the antics of the frantic citizens of Jerusalem. It will not be even a glorious defeat. You will be swallowed up in an immense calamity too tremendous to offer publicity to so infinitesimal a detail as the death of one Philadelphus Maccabaeus.

Agrippa has deserted the city and when a Herod lets go of his own, his own is not worth the holding. The city is torn between factions as implacable as the sea and the land. The conservatives are either dead or fled; pillage and disorder are the main motives of all that are left. And Titus advances with four legions. What can you hope for this mob of crazed Jews? "

Julian's words had been more lively than the Maccabee had expected. He was obliged to give attention before his kinsman made an end.

"You are fond of summaries, Julian," he said, "dealt in your own coin. Look you, now, at my hope. You confess that these Jews lack a leader. They have lacked him so long that they hunger and thirst for one. Also they have suffered the distresses of disorder so intensely that peace in any form is most welcome to them. Titus approacheth reluctantly. He had rather deliver Jerusalem than besiege it. I am of the loved and dethroned Maccabaean line — acceptable to every faction of Jewry, from the Essenes to the Sicarii. Titus is my friend, unless he suspects me as coming to undermine his better friend, the pretty Herod. I shall help Jerusalem help herself; I shall make peace with Rome; I shall be King

of the Jews! — Behold, is not my summary as practical as yours?"

Julian laughed with an amusement that had a ring of contempt in it.

"There is naught to keep an astronomer from planning a rearrangement of the stars," he said.

But the Maccabee rode on calmly. Julian sighed. After a while he spoke.

"Well, how do you proceed? You tell me that these very visionaries whom you would succor have never laid eyes on you. What marks you as royal — as a sprig of the great, just and dead Maccabee?"

"I bear proofs, Roman documents of my family and of my birth. Certain of my party are already organized in Jerusalem and are expecting me, and I wear the Maccabaean signet. Is not that enough?"

"Nothing of it worth the security of private citizenship and a whole head!"

"No? Not when there is a dowry of two hundred talents awaiting my courage to come and get it?"

"Ha! That wife! But will you enter that sure death for a woman you do not know?"

"And for a fortune I have not possessed and for a kingdom that I never owned."

"She will not be there! Old Costobarus is not so mired in folly as to send his daughter into the Pit to provide you with money to — pay Charon."

"Aquila sent me a messenger at Cæsarea," Philadelphus continued calmly, "saying that Costobarus was transfigured when he had my summons. He feels that his God has been good to him to choose his daughter to share the throne of Judea. Hence, by this time my lady awaits me in Jerusalem."

Again Julian sighed.

"And there is none in Jerusalem who knows your face?" he asked after a silence.

"None, except Amaryllis, and she has not seen me since I was sixteen years old."

"And there also is an obstacle which I had forgotten to enumerate," Julian said argumentatively. "You have put your trust in a frail woman."

"Amaryllis may be frail," the Maccabee admitted, "but she is sufficiently manly to have all that you and I demand of a man to put faith in him. She is a good companion and she will not lie."

"Impossible! She is a woman!" Julian exclaimed.

"Even then," the Maccabee returned patiently, "her own ambition safeguards me. She can not suc-

ceed except as I am successful, and her purposes are of another kind than mine. She helps herself when she helps me. Therefore I am depending on her selfishness. It is usually a dependable thing."

"What does she want?"

"The old classic times of the *heterae* in Greece. She wants to be the pioneer of art in Jerusalem. It is a fertile and a neglected field. She had rather be known as the mother of refinement in Judea than as the queen of kings over the world."

"A modest ambition!"

"A great one. How many monarchs are forgotten while Aspasia is remembered! Who were the reigning kings during Sappho's time?"

"But go on. You repose much on her influence. Perhaps she has the will but not the power to help you."

"Power! She is the mistress of John of Gischala and actual potentate over Jerusalem at this hour."

"Unless Simon bar Gioras hath taken the upper hand within the last few days. Remember the fortunes of factionists are ephemeral."

Philadelphus jingled his harness. He was sorry that he had permitted this discussion. Now its con-

tinuance was particularly irritating, when he had rather think of something else. He was near Jerusalem; but he was not going forward, now, with the same eagerness, nor with the same enthusiasm for his cause. The incident in the hills had marked the change in him. It was not, then, with a patient tongue that he defended his intentions, which had grown less inviting in the last hour.

"How little your wife will enjoy her," Julian's smooth voice broke in once more, "seeing that the frail one is lovely."

"I do not know that she is lovely."

"What!" Julian exclaimed in genuine amazement. "You do not know that she is lovely! Years of correspondence with a woman whom you do not know to be lovely! Reposing kingdoms on a woman's influence whom you do not know to be beautiful!"

"Beauty is no tie," the Maccabee retorted. "Have you forgotten Salome, the Jewish actress who could play Aphrodite in the theaters of Ephesus, to the confusion of the goddess herself? They said she snared three procurators and an emperor at one performance and lost them in a day!"

"Have you seen her?" Julian asked with a side-

long glance. "Till your own eyes prove it, you should not accept that she is so bewitching."

"There is no need that I should see her; Aquila swears it! And I would take his word against the testimony of even mine own eyes."

Julian looked up in a startled manner and hurriedly looked away again. A half-frightened, half-amused smile played about his lips.

"Aquila is no judge of woman," he said finally. "And furthermore, they say she got to trifling with magic and prowling about the temples to see if the gods came true. They were afraid she would get them blasted along with her sometime for her sacrilege. I know all this because Aquila declared she attached herself to him in sheer poverty in Ephesus and swore to follow him to the ends of the earth."

The Maccabee smiled.

"Nevertheless, he told me that he was afraid of her, but that she was a woman and in need and he could not reject her."

Julian's eyes grew insinuating.

"How much then your behavior this morning would have shocked him!" he murmured.

The smile died on the Maccabee's face. Reference

to the girl in the hills seemed blasphemy on this man's lips.

"And you do not recall your wife's face?" Julian persisted.

The Maccabee's face hardened more. But he shook his head.

"Fourteen years can change a woman from a beauty to — a — a Christian, ugly and old and cold," Julian augured.

The Maccabee turned his head away from his tormentor and Julian's laughter trailed off into a half-jocular groan.

"How much you harp on beauty!" the Maccabee said deliberately. "Are you then going to regret the actresses you left behind when I tore you from your exalted calling as the forelegs of the elephant in the theaters at Ephesus?"

Julian's face blackened. A foolhardy daring born of rage resolved him at that instant. He flung himself out from his saddle and raised his hand with a knife clenched in it. But the Maccabee with a composed laugh caught the hand and wrenching it about, dropped it, red and contracting with pain, at his companion's side.

"Tut! Julian, you are a bad combatant. If you must make way with a man," the Maccabee advised, "stab him in the back. It is sure — for you. Ha! Is this Emmaus we see?"

They had ridden up a slight eminence and below them was a disorder of fallen or decrepit Syrian huts in the hollow place in the hills.

It had been the history of Emmaus for centuries to be known. The feet of the Crucified One had pressed its ruined streets and His devoted chroniclers had not failed to set it down in their illuminated gospels. Army after army in endless procession had thundered through it since the first invader humbled the glory of Canaan, and few of the historians had forgotten to record the unimportant incident. Warfare had hurtled about it for centuries; the Roman army had come upon it and would continue to come. It had not the spirit to resist; it was not worthy of conquest. It simply stood in the path of events.

A single citizen appeared at the doorway of the most habitable house and looked absently over the heads of the new-comers. As they approached, the villager did not observe them. Instead, he looked at the near horizon lifted on the shoulder of the hills

and meditated on the signs of the weather. It was Emmaus' habit to find strangers at its door.

Julian, with natural desire to be first on this perilous ground and away from the side of the man who had defeated him and laughed at him, rode up to the door. The villager, seeing the traveler stop, gazed at him.

Julian had about him an air of blood and breeding first to be remarked even before his features. The grace of his bearing and the excellence of his bodily condition were highly aristocratic. His height was good, his figure modestly athletic as an observance of fine form rather than a preparation for the arena. He was simply dressed in a light blue woolen tunic. A handkerchief was bound about his head. His forehead was very white and half hidden by loose, curling black locks that escaped with boyish negligence from his head-dress. His eyes were black, his cheeks tanned but colorless, his mouth mirthful and red but hard in its outlines. Clean-shaven, lithe, supple, he did not appear to be more than twenty-two. But there was an even-tempered cynicism and sophistication in the half-droop of his level lids, indifference, hauteur and self-reliance in the uplift of his chin. His soul was

therefore older, more seasoned and set than the frame that housed it. Now there was considerable agitation in his manner, enough to make him sharp in his speech to the villager.

"Is there a khan in Emmaus?" he demanded.

"There is," the villager responded calmly.

"Where?"

The citizen motioned toward a low-roofed rambling structure of stone picked up on the native hills.

"Ask there," he said and passing out of his door went his way.

Julian touched his horse and rode through the worn passage and into the court of the decrepit khan of Emmaus. The Maccabee followed.

The Syrian host who was both waiter and hostler met Julian entering first.

"Quick!" Julian said, leaning from his horse. "Is there a young man here with gray temples? A pagan?"

The Syrian, attracted by the anxiety in the demand, followed a train of surmise before his answer.

"No pagans, here. Naught but Jews," he observed finally.

"Or a young woman of wealth? Quick!"

"No wealth at all; but plenty of women. The Passover pilgrims."

Julian heaved a sigh of relief and dismounted. The Maccabee rode into the court of the khan at that instant.

The khan-keeper took their horses and a little later the two men were led into the single cobwebby chamber, low-ceiled, gloomy, cold and cheerless as a cave. There they were given food and afterward a corner of the hall where a straw pallet had been laid and a stone trough filled with water for a bath. After refreshing himself the Maccabee lay down and slept with supreme indifference to the rancor of the man who had attempted to kill him.

But Julian had another idea than pressing his vengeful advantage at that time. He went out into Emmaus and engaging the unemployed of the thriftless town sent them broadcast into the hills in search of a pagan who was young, yet gray at the temples.

Some of them went — and they were chiefly boys who were not old enough to know that these strangers who come in pagan guise to Emmaus are full of guile. But none returned to him. They had neither

seen nor heard of a pagan who was young though the white hair of an old man snowed on his temples.

So Julian storming within went out into the hills himself, to search.

Meanwhile the Maccabee, a light sleeper and readily restored, awoke and found himself alone. The khan-keeper informed him on inquiry that Julian had ridden away.

"Too fair a hope to think that he has deserted me," the Maccabee observed. "I shall await him a decent time. He will return."

He tramped about the chamber waiting for something that was not Julian, intending to do something but unable to define that thing. There was a vague admission that this last pause before his entry into Jerusalem where he must accomplish so much was an opportunity for some sort of preparation, but he lacked direction and resource. He was irritable and purposeless.

Out of the low door that opened into the lewen of the khan he caught glimpses of the town spread over the tilt of the hill before him. It had become active since he had looked upon it in the very early hours of the day. Over the gate he could see the toss of can-

opies and the heads of camels passing; he could hear the ring of mule-hooves on the stones and the tramp of wayfarers. There were shoutings and debate; the cries of servants and the gossip of parties. All this moved on always in the direction of Jerusalem. Few paused. The single shop in Emmaus became active; the khan caught a little of the drift, but the great body of what seemed to be an unending stream of pilgrims passed on. The Maccabee spoke to his host.

"What is this?" he asked.

The publican raised his brows.

"Hast never heard of the Passover?" he asked.

The Maccabee started. How far he had drifted from the customs of his people, to fail to remember its vital feast — he who meant to be king over the Jews!

He turned away a little abashed. The train of thought awakened by the khan-keeper's answer led him back to the hieratic customs of his race. What was his status as a Jew after all these years of delinquency? What atonement did he owe, what offering should he make?

He went out over the cobbled pavement of the lewen to the gate. Here he should see part of his people

and learn from simple observation what material he would have in his work for Israel.

From his memories of the old Passovers of his boyhood, he saw instantly that there had come a change over Judea and the worshiping sons of Abraham.

They went in bodies, in numbers from a handful from some remote but pious hamlet to great armies from the leveled cities of Joppa, Ptolemais and Anthedon, from Cæsarea and Tyre and Sidon, from the enthusiastic towns in Galilee, and even from far-off Antioch and Ephesus. They were not fewer in number, because of a year of warfare and the menace of an approaching army upon the city in which they were to take refuge. But there were more — double, even triple the number that usually went up to Jerusalem at this time. For of the millions of inhabitants in Judea in the unhappy year of 70 A. D., a third of them were plundered and homeless refugees from ruined cities. Therefore, instead of the armies of men, happy, hopeful and enthusiastic, who had journeyed in former years to Jerusalem, there passed before the Maccabee a mixed multitude of men and women and children. Thousands carried with them all that warfare had left to them — pitiful parcels of

treasure or household goods, or extra clothing; other thousands bore nothing in their hands, and by the wear in their garments and the hunger in their faces, it seemed that they owned nothing to carry.

The Maccabee noted finally the entire absence of the travelers who fared in state. Not in all that long procession that wound up the stony passage from the west, did he see a single Sadducee. There went mobs of laborers and farmers, tradesmen, servants and small merchants, but the Jewish friends of Rome that had once made part of the Passover pilgrimage a royal progress were nowhere to be seen. Under the vast, vivid blue of the mountain skies they moved, indifferent to the splendid benevolence of the untroubled day. The pure wind swept in from the radiance in the east, flinging out multi-colored garments and scarves, rushing with its bracing chill without obstruction through even the compactest mass of wayfarers. The cedars on the hills about the little town whistled continuously and at times some extremely narrow defile with an uninterrupted draft would take voice and cry humanly. But there was no responsive exhilaration to the vigor of morning on a mountain-

top. The great ever-growing migration was dark, dangerous and moody.

Somewhere beyond the highest of the blue hills to the east, the white walls of the city of David were receiving all this. Somewhere to the west the four brassy legions of Titus were marching down upon all this. About the Maccabee were assembling all the circumstances that govern a tremendous struggle. Eagerness, earnestness, all the strength and resolution of his strong and resolute nature surged into his soul. It was his hour. It should find him prepared.

He turned out of the gate and crowding along by the stone wall to pass in the opposite direction from the flood of pilgrims pouring through Emmaus, he searched for the synagogue of the little town.

He came upon it, a solid square building of stone with an Egyptic façade and an architrave carved with a great stone flower set in an olive wreath. Without was the proseuchae, paved with boulders now worn smooth by the summer sittings of the congregation who gathered around the reader's stone. The Maccabee stopped at the gate and unlacing his pagan sandals set them outside the threshold.

Once over the stone sill with the imminent gloom covering him, he felt the old sanctity envelop him with a reproach in its forgotten familiarity. Old incense, old litanies, old rites rushed back to him with the smell of the stagnant fragrance. He heard again from the farther depths of the dark interior the musical monotone of a rabbi reciting a ritual. The voice was young and low. Presently he heard the responses spoken in a woman's voice, so tender, so soft and so sad that he sensed instantly the meaning of the sympathy in the young priest's voice. Out of the incense-laden dusk he found old custom stealing back upon him. His lips anticipated words unreadily; gladly he realized that he could say these formulas, also; he had not forgotten; he had not forgotten!

In this little synagogue in a poor town there were no privacies; communicants had to depend on the courtesy of their fellows for uninterrupted devotion. The wanderer had not forgotten this. So he effaced himself in the darkness and awaited his own turn.

He hardly knew why he had come. For what should he ask — forgiveness or for the hope of the King who was to come? What should he do — make

atonement or promises; give an offering or ask encouragement? He did not doubt for an instant that he had done wisely in seeking the synagogue, but what had he for it, or what had it for him?

Meanwhile the voice of the priest, disembodied in the gloom, had put off its ritualistic tone and was delivering a charge:

"Since you are in haste to reach Jerusalem, you may depart, so that you will give me your word that you will in all faith abide upon the road seven days; and that at the end of the separation you will present yourselves for examination and cleansing at Jerusalem, and that you will in nowise transgress the law of separation on the journey hence."

The Maccabee heard the woman give her word. After a little further communication, he heard them move toward the entrance.

The white light from the day without revealed to him in a few steps, a veiled woman, a deformed old man and a young rabbi. He did not need to take the evidence of her dress or of her companion to recognize under this veil the girl whom he had won from Julian of Ephesus, in the hills, that very morning.

As if in response to his inner hope that she would

see him, she raised her eyes at the moment she passed, and started quickly. Even under the shelter of her veil he saw her flush.

The next instant she was out of the synagogue and gone.

The Maccabee hesitated restlessly, forgot his mission to the synagogue and then, with no definite purpose, followed.

At the edge of town, where the huddle of huts left off and the gravel and rock and cedar began, he saw the priest dismiss the pair with his blessing and turn back.

Undecided, restless and regretful, the Maccabee lingered, looking after her as she went into the hills, unattended, except for an anomalous old man. The sun of noon shone on her silver dress that the dust of the wayside had not tarnished. He was gloomy and wistful without understanding his discomfort, and afraid for the beautiful unknown going out for seven days into the unfriendly wilderness.

There was the click of a horse's hoof beside him. He glanced up with a nervous start to see Julian of Ephesus, scowling, at hand.

"It is time," he said, "for us to be off."

The Maccabee instantly determined that Julian of Ephesus should not come up with this defenseless girl again.

"I am not ready," he returned promptly.

"It was three days, this morning, that you have lost. To-morrow it will be four."

"And Sabbath, it will be seven. A long time, a long time!"

The Maccabee turned and went back to the khan. A gap in the hills had hidden the girl in the silver tissue, and the blitheness of the Maccabee's spirit had gone with her.

CHAPTER V

BY THE WAYSIDE

By sunset, the Maccabee and Julian of Ephesus had taken the road to Jerusalem again.

As they reached the crest of a series of ridges there lay before them a long gentle slope smooth and dun-colored as some soft pelt, dropping down into a tender vale with levels of purple vapor hanging over it. At the end of this declivity, leagues in length, was a faint blue shape, cloudlike and almost merged with the cold color of the eastern horizon, but suddenly developing at its summit a delicate white peak. The sunset reaching it as they rode changed the point to a pinnacle of ruby before their eyes. Their shadows that had ridden before them merged with the shade over the world. Then with a soft, whispery, ghost-like intaking of the breath, a quantity of sand on the straight road before them got up under their horses' feet and moved away to another spot and dropped

again with a peppering sound and was dead moveless earth again. The little breath of wind from under the edge of the sky had fallen.

In the silence between the muffled beat of hooves the Maccabee heard at his ears the quick lively throb of a busy pump. With it went the firm rush of a subdued stream. He was hearing his own heart-beat, his own life flowing through his veins. Since nature in him had hurried him out of the synagogue after its own desire, he seemed to have become primitive, conscious of the human creature in him. Now, though he rode through a bewitching air through an enchanted land, he did not ride in a dream. All his being was alert and sagacious. Though the confusion of footprints in the dust showed plainly where men had passed by thousands, he did not follow their lead. Over the tangle of marks lay a slim paw-printed, confident, careless trail of a jackal, following the scent to a well. The Maccabee was obedient to the instinct of the animal instead of the reason of man. At the end of that trail, surer than Ariadne's scarlet thread in the labyrinth, he knew that thirst had taken the girl in the dress of silver tissue. So as he rode along this faultless highway that fared level

and undeviating by arches, causeways and bridges across mountains, over black marshes and profound valleys, he kept his eyes on the jackal's trail.

Long after moonrise they came to a spot in the road where the human marks passed on, by hundreds, by other hundreds deserted the road and clambered up the side of the hill. Over this deviation the jackal had trotted. The Maccabee, tall on his horse, raised his fine head and searched all the brooding shapes of the hills about.

The road at this point ran through a defile. On either side the slopes crowded upon the pass. Above them were bold summits with groves of cedars, and in one of these the Maccabee made out a thin curl of smoke dimly illuminated by a moon-drowned fire. Up there in the covert of the trees the girl in the silver tissue was resting from her perilous and outlawed journey.

"We will eat here," the Maccabee said abruptly to Julian.

"Eat!" Julian exclaimed. "What?"

The Maccabee signed to the pack on Julian's horse. Julian dismounted, shaking his head.

"What a savage appetite this travel in the un-

taught wilds of Judea hath bred in you, my cousin! You, whom once a crust of bread and a cup of wine would satisfy!"

But the Maccabee climbed out of the roadway and, finding a sheltered spot behind a boulder, kicked together some of the dead weeds and twigs and set fire to the heap with flint and steel. Then he lost interest in the preparation of his comforts. He turned to look up at the faint column of illumination in the little copse of cedars and presently, stealthily, went that way.

It was a poor encampment that he came upon.

From the low-growing limbs of a couple of gnarly cedars, old Momus had stretched the sheepskins which Joseph, the shepherd, had given them. Three sides of the shelter were protected thus, and the fourth side opened down-hill, with a low fire screening them from the mountain wind. Within this inclosure, wrapped in the coarse mantle of her servant, sat Laodice. She had raised her veil and its misty texture flowed like a web of frost over her brilliant hair and framed her face in cold vapor. In spite of the marks of grief that had exhausted her tears, the fatigue and discomfort, she seemed, to the Maccabee's eyes, more than

ever lovely. He was angry with the hieratic banishment that sent her out to subsist by the roadside for seven days in early spring; angry with the harsh inhospitality of the hills; and angrier that he could not change it all. He looked at the old mute to see that he was carefully putting away the remnants of a meal of durra bread and curds. The primitive gallantry of the original man stirred in the Maccabee. He had come unseen; with silent step he departed.

A little later he stepped boldly into the circle of light from their camp-fire. To Laodice, in her lowly position, he seemed superhumanly big and splendid. Without mantle or any of the accessories that would show preparation against the cold, his bare arms and limbs and dark face, tanned, hardy and resolute, seemed to be those of a strong aborigine, sturdy friend of all of nature's rougher moods.

He did not look at Momus, who got up as quickly as he might at the intrusion of the big stranger. His dark eyes rested on Laodice, who sat transfixed with her sudden recognition of the visitor.

He held in one hand a brace of fowls, in the other a skin of wine.

When he spoke the polish of the Ephesian andro-

nitis in his voice and manner destroyed the primitive illusion.

"Lady, I heard in the synagogue at Emmaus to-day the exclusion that is laid upon you for seven days. This is a hungry country and no man should waste food. I shall enter Jerusalem to-morrow by daybreak; we, my companion and I, have no further use for these. They are Milesian ducks, fattened on nuts. And this is Falernian — Roman. I pray you, allow me to leave them with your servant with my obeisances."

Without waiting for her reply the Maccabee passed fowls and skin into the hands of Momus who stood near.

"Sir," she answered unreadily, with her small hands gripping each other before her and her eyes veiled, "I thank you. It was not the least of my anxieties how we should provide ourselves with food under prohibition and in a country perilous with war. You have made to-morrow easy for us. I thank you."

"To-morrow; yes," he argued, seizing upon a discussion for an excuse to remain, "but the next day, and the next five days, what shall you do?"

"Perchance," she said gravely, "God will send us

another stranger of a generous heart, with more than he needs for himself."

Not likely, indeed, he thought, would such beauty as hers go hungry as long as there were hearts in the wilderness as impressionable as his. But the thought of another than himself providing for her did not make him happy.

There was nothing more to be said, but he did not go. In his face gathered signs of his interest in her identity.

"Is there more that I can do for you?" he asked. "Have you friends in Jerusalem? I will bear your messages gladly."

But it was a grateful privilege which she had to refuse with reluctance. If her husband awaited her in Jerusalem, he must wait, rather than be informed of the cause of her delay at peril of exposing his presence in the city. She shook her head.

"There is nothing more," she added. "I thank you."

Dismissal was so evident in her voice that he prepared to depart.

"Shall you move on, then, in the morning?" he asked.

"We have seven days in the wilderness," she explained. "We can not hasten. It is only a little way to Jerusalem."

"But it is a long road and a weary one for tender feet," he answered; "and it is a time of warfare and much uncertainty."

She lifted her eyes now with trouble in them.

"Is there any less dangerous way than this?" she asked.

The Maccabee sat down and clasped his hands about his knees. This grasping at the slightest excuse to remain exasperated the perplexed Momus, who could not understand the stranger's assurance. But the Maccabee failed to see him.

"There is," he said to Laodice. "One can journey with you. I am under no restriction, and the rabbis do not bind you against me. I can secure you comforts along the way, and give you protection. There in no such dire need that I enter Jerusalem under seven days."

Laodice was confused by this sudden offer of help from a stranger in whom her confidence was not entirely settled. Nevertheless a warmth and pleasure crept into her heart benumbed with sorrow. She did

not look at Momus, fearing instinctively that the command in her old servant's eyes would not be of a kind with the grateful response she meant to give this stranger.

"I have no right to expect so much — from a stranger," she said.

"Then I shall not be a stranger," he declared promptly. "Call me — Hesper — of Ephesus."

"Ephesus!" she echoed, looking up quickly.

"The maddest city in the world," he replied. "Dost know it?"

She hesitated. Could she say with entire truth that she did not know Ephesus? Had she not read those letters that Philadelphus had written to her father, which were glowing with praise of the proud city of Diana? Was it not as if she had seen the Odeum and the great Theater, the Temple with its golden cows, the mount and the plain and the broad wandering of the Rivers Hermus, Cayster and Maenander? Had she not made maps of it from her young husband's accounts and then with enthusiasm traced his steps by its stony, hilly streets from forum to stadium and from school to museum? Had she not dreamed of its shallow port, its rugged highways and its skyey

marshes? It had been her pride to know Ephesus, although she had never laid eyes upon it. Even she had come to believe that she would know an Ephesian by his aggressive joy in life! It went hard with her to deny that she knew that city which she had all but seen.

The Maccabee observed her hesitation and when she looked up to answer, his eyes full of question were resting upon her.

"I do not know Ephesus," she said quickly. "Are — are you a native?"

"No."

She wanted mightily to know if he had met the young Philadelphus in that city, but she feared to ask further lest she betray him.

"A great city," he went on, "but there are greater pagan cities. It is not like Jerusalem, which has no counterpart in the world. Even the most intolerant pagan is curious about Jerusalem."

She looked again at his face. It was not Greek or Roman, neither more indicative of her own blood.

"Are you a Jew?" she asked.

He remembered that she had seen him in a synagogue.

"I was," he said after a silence.

She looked at him a moment before she made comment.

"I never heard a Jew say it that way before."

He acknowledged the rebuke with the flash of a smile that appeared only in his eyes.

"A Jew entirely Jewish wears the mark on him. You have had to ask if I were a Jew. Would I be consistent to claim to be that which in no wise shows to be in me?"

"It is time to be a Jew or against the Jews," she said gravely. "There is no middle ground concerning Judea at this hour."

Serious words from the lips of a woman in whom a man expects to find entertainment are obtrusive, a paradox. Still the new generosity in his heart for this girl made any manner she chose, engaging, so that it showed him the sight of her face and gave him the sound of her voice.

"Seeing," he said, "that it is the hour of the Jewish hope, is it politic for us to declare ourselves for its benefits?"

"The call at this hour," she exclaimed reproach-

fully, "is to be great in sacrifice—not for reward. It is the word of the prophets that we shall not attain glory until we have suffered for it. We have not yet made the beginning."

She touched so familiarly on his own thoughts which had haunted him since ambition had awakened in him in his boyhood, that his interest in his own hope surged to the fore.

"How goes it in Jerusalem?" he asked earnestly.

"Evilly, they say," she answered, "but I have not been in the city. Yet you see Judea. That which has destroyed it threatens the city. Jews have no friends abroad over the world. We need then our own, our own!"

"Trust me, lady, for a good Jew. I have said that I had been one, because I admit how far I have drifted from my people. But I am going back!"

Somehow that strong avowal touched the deep springs of her grief. She knew the pleasure that her father would have felt in it. With the greatness of his sacrifice in mind, she filled with the determination that his work should not have been in vain.

She rose and flung back the cumbrous striped man-

tle on her shoulders and put out her hands to the Maccabee.

"Hast seen these pilgrims going to the Passover?" she exclaimed, with color rising as her emotion grew. "All day they have passed; army after army of Jews, not only strong, but filled with the spirit that makes men die for a cause! Hast seen Judea, which was once the land of milk and honey? Wasted! a sight to make Jews gnash their teeth and die of hate and rage! What hast thou said of Jerusalem? 'The perfection of beauty and the joy of the whole earth!' threatened with this same blight that hath made a wilderness of Canaan! If the hour and the circumstance and the cause will but unite us, this unweaponed host will stretch away at once in majestic orders of tens of thousands — legions upon legions that would shame Xerxes for numbers and that first Cæsar for strength. Then — oh, I can see that calm battle-line pass like the ocean tide over the stony Roman front, and forget as the sea forgets the pebbles that opposed it!"

She halted suddenly on the edge of tears. The Maccabee, astonished and moved, looked at her in silence. This, then, was what even the women of the

shut chambers of Palestine expected of him — if he freed Judea! If such spirit prevailed over the armies of men assembling in the Holy City, what might he not achieve with their help! The Maccabee felt confidence and enthusiasm fill his heart to the full. He rose.

"Our blows will never weaken nor our hearts grow faint," he said, "if we have such eloquence and such beauty to inspire us."

She drew back a little. His persistent happiness of mood fell cruelly on her flinching heart at that moment. He noted her sudden relapse into dejection, with disappointment.

"Do not be sad," he said. "Discomforts do not last for ever."

"It is not that," she said in a low voice. "I have buried beloved dead on this journey and I have surrendered all my substance to a pillager."

There was the silence of arrested thought. The Maccabee was taken aback and embarrassed. He felt that he was an intruder. But even the flush on her face in restraining emotion made her loveliness more than ever winsome. He let his hand drop softly on hers. But in the genuineness of his sympathy he was

not too moved to feel that her hand warmed under his clasp.

"The difference between a fool and a blunderer," he said contritely, "is that the blunderer is always sorry for his mistakes. I will go. None has a right to refuse another his hour to weep."

He hesitated a moment, as if he would have kissed her hand. She glanced up at him with eyes too filled with the darkness of grief for words.

The slow unconscious smile that had worked such perfect transformation that first morning grew in his eyes. It was comfort, compliment and protection all in one. Then he went away into the moonlight.

Within a few feet he came upon Julian of Ephesus with immense rancor written on his face. The Maccabee was disturbed. It was not well that this conscienceless man should have discovered that they were traveling near this girl and her old servant. Much as the young man wished to loiter along the road to Jerusalem to keep her in sight while he could, he saw plainly that to defend her from Julian he must ride on and leave her.

"Your meal," said Julian, "is as cold as Jugurtha's bath."

"I have lost my appetite," the Maccabee said carelessly. "Saddle and let us ride on."

At his words, a picture of his own comfortable progress to Jerusalem compared to her long foot-weary tramp for days over the inhospitable hills appeared to him. The instant impulse did not permit himself to argue the immoderation of his care of her. Julian clung to his side until they were ready to depart. Then the Maccabee, using subterfuge to give him opportunity to escape the vigilant eyes of the Ephesian, suddenly clapped his hand to his hip, exclaiming that he had left his weapon at the camp.

Before Julian's sneer reached him, he mounted quickly and rode up the hill, meaning to offer his horse to the girl.

The bed of coals still glowed cheerily, but the shelter of sheepskins, the old servant and the girl in the tissue of woven moonbeams were gone.

He stood still, vexed, disappointed and resentful.

"The old incubus has made her go on, purposely, to get rid of me!" he decided finally. "Perpol! He won't!"

CHAPTER VI

DAWN IN THE HILLS

It was a night that the Maccabee did not readily forget. Since the girl had moved on to avoid him, he had become alive to a delinquency that was more of a sensation than an admission. His thought of her, that had been a diversion before, now seemed to be a transgression. An incident of this nature during the fourteen years of his life in Ephesus would have engaged his conscience only a moment if at all, but at this last hour it amounted to a deflection from his newly resolved uprightness.

Julian rode in a constant air of expectancy and increasing irritation. The slightest sound from the haunted hills elicited a start from him and his intense attention until the origin of the sound proved itself. Many Passover pilgrims who had proceeded by night passed under his close scrutiny and from time to time he stopped the Maccabee in a speech with a peremp-

tory command to listen. All this engaged the Maccabee's interest, but he made no comment until, on occasion of his casual word in praise of the fidelity of Aquila, Julian flew into a rage and reviled the emissary until the Maccabee brought him up with a sharp word.

"Enough of that!" he exclaimed. "What ails you, man?"

Julian caught his breath and after a silence replied in a voice considerably sweetened that Aquila was a conscienceless pagan and not to be praised till he was dead. But the Maccabee, with the girl uppermost in his mind, believed that his cousin was inwardly resenting his preëmption of the pretty stranger. The fact that Julian had changed the pace of their advance confirmed him in this suspicion. From the smart trot that they had maintained from the time they had left Cæsarea, they had declined to a walk. Julian next showed inclination to loiter. He spent an unusual length of time at every spring at which they watered their horses; an unseen break in his harness engaged a prolonged halt on the road; he stopped at an unroofed hut to rouse sleeping Passover pilgrims who had taken refuge within to ask how far they

were from Jerusalem, and wrangled with the sleepy Jew for many minutes over the hazy estimate the man had given him. With each of these pretenses the Maccabee's conviction grew that the girl had something to do with the altered behavior of his cousin. And with that growing conviction, he became the more convinced that he ought to maintain an espionage of Julian.

At midnight they were both tired, exasperated, moody, and determined against each other. They had not journeyed thirty furlongs.

In one of the high valleys in the hills a great well bubbled up from a hollow by the road, overflowed the stone basin that the ancients had built for it and wasted itself in the undrained soil about. Here, then, was one of the few marshes in Judea. The road by a series of arches crossed it and continued up the shoulder of the hills toward the east. All about it flourished the young growth of the rough sedge grass, green as emerald. The spot was treeless and marked with broad low hummocks of new sod.

Julian halted.

"Shall we camp here?" he asked.

"It hath the recommendation of variety," the Mac-

cabee said wearily. "Eheu! How I shall miss the greensward of Ephesus! Yes, we'll camp!"

They dismounted and while Julian unpacked their blankets, the Maccabee collected dead reeds and cedar twigs and built a fire. Then he stretched himself by the sweet-smelling flame.

"She can not have kept up with our horses; indeed it is unlikely that they moved far," he thought, and thus assured that there was no danger to the girl for whom he had become a self-constituted guardian, he ate a piece of bread, drank a cup of wine and fell asleep.

His slumber was not entirely unconscious. So long as the movements of his cousin continued regular about him, he lay still, but once, when Julian approached too near, his eyes opened full in the face of the man about to lean over him. The Ephesian raised himself hastily and the Maccabee's eyes closed again.

"A pest on an eye that only half sleeps!" Julian said to himself. "He hasn't lost count on the minutes since he left Cæsarea!"

The morning broke, the sun mounted, the deserted road became populous with all the previous day's host of pilgrims, and the silence in the hills failed

before the procession that should not cease till night fell again. Through all the shouting at camel and mule, the talk of parties and the dogged trudging of lonely and uncompanionable solitaries, the Maccabee slept. From time to time Julian, who had wakened early, gazed with smoldering eyes at the insolent composure of his enemy sleeping. But slumber with so little control over the senses of a man was not to be depended upon for any work that demanded stealth. At times the gaze he bent upon the long lazy shape half buried in the raw-edged grass was malevolent with uneasiness and hate. Again, some one of the passing travelers that bore a resemblance to the expected Aquila would bring the Ephesian to his feet, only to sink back again with a muttered imprecation at his disappointment.

"A pest on the waxen-hearted satyr!" he said to himself finally. "Why should he have been more faithful to me than to his first employer! I am old enough to have learned by this time not to trust my success to any man but myself. Now where am I to look for him—Ephesus, Syene, Gaul, Medea? Jerusalem first! By Hecate, the fellow is handsome! And these Jewesses are impressionable!"

The rumination was broken off suddenly by a glimpse of an old deformed man bearing a burden on his shoulders, followed by a slender figure, jealously wrapped in a plebeian mantle that left only a hem of silver tissue under its border. They were skirting along the brow of the hill opposite, away from the rest of the pilgrims on the road. Both were walking slowly and the old man seemed to be examining the farther slope, as if meditating a halt. Julian got upon his feet and watched. He saw the old man sign to the girl presently and they moved down the farther side of the hill and were lost to view.

Julian cast a look at the sleeper and hesitated. Then he scanned the road; he might miss Aquila. He seemed to relinquish the intent that had risen in him, and sat down again.

After a while as his constant gaze at the passers-by led him again toward the overflowing well, he saw there, standing in a long line, awaiting turn to dip a vessel in the water, the old bowed servant, with a skin in his hand. The girl was nowhere to be seen.

Julian sprang to his feet and, hastening across the road, considerably below the well, climbed the hill in the direction in which he had seen the girl disappear.

That watchful alarm in the brain which, at moments of demand, is instantly alive in certain sleepers, aroused the Maccabee almost as soon as the stealthy, receding footsteps of Julian died away. He stirred, sat up and looked about him. Julian was nowhere to be seen. Both horses were feeding a little distance away. The Maccabee sprang up and looked toward the well. There patiently but apprehensively waiting was old Momus. The girl was not with him. Suspicion grew vivid in the Maccabee's brain. The tender rank grass about him showed the print of his cousin's steps as they led away toward the road. He followed intently. The slim marks of the well-shod feet led him across the dust of the road up into gravel on the slope and finally eluded him on the escarpment that soared away above him.

The Maccabee hurried to the top of the declivity to gain whatever aid that point of vantage might offer and from that height saw below him to the west a single nook shaped of rock and hummock and a tree out of which rose a blue thread of smoke. He dropped down the farther slope at a pace little short of a run.

He mounted the slight ridge that overlooked the

depression in time to see Julian of Ephesus appear over the opposite side. Within, with her mantle laid off, her veil thrown back, the girl knelt over a bed of coals, baking one of the Maccabee's Milesian ducks. Julian had made a sound; the Maccabee had come silently. She looked up and saw the less kindly man first, flashed white with terror, sprang to her feet with a cry, and whirled to flee up the other side. There she confronted the Maccabee with hands extended to ward off the encroachment of his cousin. Without an instant's hesitation she flew into the Maccabee's arms. His clasp closed around her and she shrank against him, clinging to the folds of his tunic over his breast with hands that were tremulous.

Her flight to him for refuge achieved an instant change in the Maccabee. The fear of defeat, the primal hate of a rival, died in him. All that remained was big wrath at the presumption and effrontery of Julian of Ephesus. He had no definite memory of what followed, because of the rush of blood in his veins, the whirl of pleasurable sensation in his brain and the weight of a sweet frightened figure pressed to him. The Ephesian went, leaving an impression of a most vindictive threat in the glittering smile and

the motion of his shapely hand clenched at the victorious Maccabee. The girl drew away hastily. The veil was over her face and through its silken meshes he saw the glow on her cheeks and the sweep of her lowered lashes down upon that bloom.

She was faltering her thanks and her apologies.

"It is mine to ask pardon," he exclaimed, still smoldering with wrath. "I had no part in this, except to interfere with this bad companion of mine. I did not follow you; believe me."

It confused her to know that he had guessed why she had moved from their encampment the night before. As necessary as old Momus had made it seem to her then, it seemed now to have been ungrateful. She could make no reply to that portion of his speech.

"My servant went to the well," she said. "He will return presently. I am not afraid now."

"I am; you ought to be. I shall wait till your extraordinary servant returns."

At this decided speech Laodice showed a little panic.

"No, no! I am not afraid. He —"

But the Maccabee ignored the implied dismissal.

"I owe him both a reproof and thanks for leaving you here alone for any wayfarer to approach — and for me to discover. I wish," gazing abroad over the broken horizon, "there were no well between here and Jerusalem, and that he were as thirsty as Tantalus."

She made no reply to this remark, but her whole presence expressed discomfort in his determination to remain.

"Heathen Hecate ought to get him in these wilds for forcing that cruel journey on you last night, when you were so weary and sad! There was no good in it. He wanted simply to get you away from me! Let us hope that Titus has got him for his museum by this time, and be at ease!"

She raised her head and reproach flashed through the meshes of her veil.

"Momus is a good man," she said.

"He can not be," he insisted. "Have I not set forth his iniquities even now?"

"It was a short task," she maintained. "But time is not long enough to count his virtues."

"I can spend time better," he declared.

He saw her silken brows lower in a spirited frown and he was glad. She was showing some other feeling

than that dead level of unhappiness that had possessed her from the first moment he had seen her. His was not the heart contented to go astray after a tear. Men fall in search of joy.

"Momus is carrying a burden under which more brilliant men would falter," she averred. "I am beyond reckoning his debtor!"

"Since he has shifted that sweet burden for a time on my shoulders, I will forgive him for his looks. If he will stay away, I'll be his debtor further. But enough of Momus! I came to ask after your health, when your long journey by night is done."

"I am well; we did not journey all night."

"Sit, I pray you. There is no need for you to stand with that air of finality. I am not going, yet. I went back to your camp last night within a short time after I left you and found the camp broken and your fire lonely. I wanted to offer you my horse."

"We did not walk all night. We camped a little farther on, and moved at daybreak this morning," she explained.

He cast a reflective look at the sun and considered how much time Julian of Ephesus had lost for him upon the road, or else how long he had slept, that this

pair, who had camped all night and had journeyed afoot by day, had caught up with him.

"Still it was a cruel journey — for those little feet," he said.

She glanced involuntarily at her sandals, worn and dusty.

"Yes," he said compassionately, following her eyes. "But let me see no more, else I meet this good and burdened Momus with the flat of my hand when he comes! What is he to you?"

"My servant — now almost my father!" she insisted, trying to cover the tacit accusation that she had made in admitting by a glance that she was weary. "He orders all things for my good. Do you think that each of the stones over which I stumbled to-day did not hurt him worse because they hurt me? Do you think he would have me go on, unless the stake were worth the pain I had to endure? Say no more against him!"

The Maccabee shrugged his shoulders; then noting that she still stood, he smoothed down a spot of the sand with his foot, tossed upon it one of the sheepskins that Momus had unrolled, and extending his hand politely pressed her down on the place he had

made. Then he dropped down beside her, lounging on his elbow.

"What is the stake?" he asked after he had composed himself.

She hesitated, regretting that her defense of Momus had led her to hint her mission and touch upon her husband's ambition.

"The welfare of hosts!" she replied finally.

"Heavens! What a menace I was!" the Maccabee smiled.

She colored quickly and he resented the veil that was shutting away so much that was fine and fleeting by way of expression under its folds.

"But you are just as dangerous," he declared. "Now, we should be in Jerusalem this hour. Our welfare and the welfare of others depend upon us — I mean my companion and me. But there is no devoted prodigy to bear me away — thank fortune! I have come out of a great turmoil; I must plunge into a greater one before many days. Let me rest between them. It will be a long time before I shall possess anything so sweet as the smell of this cedar fire and the picture of you against this fair sky!"

She looked down quickly.

"Was Ephesus in turmoil?" she asked disconnectedly.

"Ephesus was never in any other state! A fit preparation for the disorder in Jerusalem! I was met at Cæsarea with such tales as depressed me until it required such delight as you are to bring back my spirits again! What takes you to Jerusalem?" he asked earnestly. "The Passover? God will forgive you if you neglect it one year. Nothing but the sternest necessity should send any one there at this hour."

"My necessity is stern — it is Judea's necessity," she answered.

"More similarity!" he exclaimed. "That is why I go! Certainly Judea's fortunes have bettered with you and me both hastening to her rescue. Come, let us compare further. I am going to crown a king over Judea!"

She raised her veil to look at him with startled eyes. The glimpse of her face, for ever a delight and an astonishment to him because of its extraordinary loveliness, swept him out of the half-serious air into which he had fallen. He stopped and looked at her with pleased, boyish, happy eyes.

"Aurora!" he said softly. "I see now why day comes gradually. Mankind would die of excitement if the dawn were unveiled to them like this suddenly every morning!"

She released the veil hurriedly, but before it fell he put out a hand, caught it and tossed it back over her head.

"Be consistent with your part," he said, still smiling. "No man ever saw day cancel her dawn and live."

It was pleasant, this sweet possession and command. How much like an overgrown boy he had become, since she had wakened to find herself in his power that morning in the hills! The harshness and inflexibility had left his atmosphere entirely. She was only afraid of him now because he had refused to be dismissed. But she drew down the veil.

"I, too, expect a king," she said in a lowered tone. "A conqueror and a redeemer."

"The Messiah?" he said, and she knew by the inflection that he had not meant that King when he had spoken.

He noted that her hair was coiled upon her head

when he threw back her veil and he turned to that at once.

"You wear your hair in a fashion," he said, "that once meant that which men dislike to discover of a woman whom they greatly admire. I hope it is no longer significant."

"I go," she said after a silence, "to join my husband in Jerusalem."

The Maccabee's lips parted and an expression of disappointment with an admixture of surprise and vexation came over his face. But what did it matter? Were she as free as air, he was a married man. The humor of the situation appealed to him. He dropped his head into the bend of his elbow and laughed.

"Welladay, this is a respite for us both, then," he said. But realizing that an admission that he was married might hopelessly reduce their hour to a formal basis, he took refuge in a falsehood.

"My companion expects to meet a wife in Jerusalem," he continued. "A royal creature, daughter of an ancient and haughty family, with all her life purpose congealed in lofty and serious intent, her coffers lined with gold and her face as determined and un-

bending as Juno's with her jealousy stirred. He is not delighted, poor lad!"

Laodice sat very still and listened. There was enough similarity in this story to interest her.

The Maccabee, seeing that he had made an impression with this deception and feeling somehow a relief in making it, went on, delighted with his deceit.

"He has not seen her since he married her in his childhood, but he knows full well how she will look when he meets her."

Surprise paralyzed Laodice. Was the smiling and dangerous companion of this man, her husband?

The Maccabee, meanwhile, deliberately remarked her charms and recounted their antithesis in making up a picture of the woman he expected to meet as his wife.

"She will, according to his expectations, be meager and thin, not plump! Thoughtful women and women with a purpose are never plump! And she will be black and pale, all eyes, with a nose which is not the noble nose of our race. She will be religious and it will not make her happy. She will realize her value to her husband and he will not be permitted to forget it. She will be ambitious and full of schemes. She

will be the larger part of his family, though by the balance she will weigh not so much as an omer of barley."

Laodice got upon her feet in her agitation and raised her veil to stare at this slander. Was this a picture of herself she heard? The Maccabee was enjoying himself uncommonly.

"She will wear the garments of a queen, but — how little a slip of silver tissue will become her!"

Laodice looked down in alarm at her gleaming garment, and reached for her mantle. The Maccabee had no idea how much pleasure he was to derive in making his own story, Julian's. He continued, almost recklessly, now.

"Small wonder that he is so delinquent in the wilderness, with such square-shouldered righteousness awaiting him in town! Forgive him, lady, for his iniquities now, for he will be a good man after he reaches Jerusalem; by my soul, you may be sure he will be good!"

Laodice gasped under the pressure of astonishment and indignation. It was bad enough to be pictured thus unprepossessing, but to be suddenly made aware of her husband in a man whom she feared, was desper-

ate. She stared with frank and horrified eyes at her tormentor.

"But — but — " she stammered.

"True," he sighed. "One can not know what calamity forces another into misdeeds. Now were I my unfortunate friend, perhaps I should afflict you with my hunger for sweetness also."

And that smooth, insinuating, violent pagan was Philadelphus Maccabaeus! But what had her father said of him, as a child? "Quick in temper, resourceful, aye, even shifty, stubborn, cold in heart, hard to please!" And to this man she must present herself, late, penniless and unhelpful. Panic seized her! How could she go on to Jerusalem!

That long graceful figure stretched on the sand was speaking. What was it in his voice that drew her so mightily from any terror that possessed her at any time?

"Sit down, sit down! I have more to say," he was urging her.

She obeyed him numbly.

"He gets worse as he approaches the city. I think I ought to leave him. It will not be safe to be near him when his moneyed lady claims him for her own!"

"She — she —" Laodice burst out, "is — may be such a woman!"

"Such a woman as you! No; she will not be. That is what makes him bad. And now that I bethink me, perhaps it is just as well that you proceed to Jerusalem. He may comfort himself with a sight of you, now and then."

"I? I comfort him?" she exclaimed.

"By my soul I know it! What blunders Fortune makes in bestowing wives! Perchance your husband could have got on as well without so radiant a spouse, while my poor beauty-loving friend must needs be paired with a — Alas! there is too much marrying in this world!"

There was a ring of genuine dejection in his voice and when she looked down at him, she saw that his eyes were larger and more sorrowful than she believed they could be. He was hurting himself with his own deceit. She looked away hastily, frightened at the sudden tenderness that his pathetic gaze had wakened in her.

"Alas!" he went on. "The greatest sacrifice and the frequentest in this world of cross-purposes never gets into poetry. I —" he halted a moment and

looked away, "I ought to be sorry for her, too. She is not getting the best of men."

"Verily!" she exclaimed impulsively.

He whirled his head toward her, stared; then with a flash of intense expression in his eyes burst into a ringing laugh that shook him from head to foot. He flung out his hand and catching hers passed it across his lips without kissing it, and let it go before he regained composure enough to speak.

"No! Not a good man! Verily! But hath he no cause to be delinquent?"

"No!" she said stubbornly. "He has judged her without seeing her, when, by your own words, he expects her to bring him fortune and position. What is he bringing her?"

The Maccabee looked at her thoughtfully before he answered.

"Nothing! Not even his heart!" he vowed.

Laodice caught her breath in an agony of indignation and distress.

"He does not in any way deserve —" she stopped precipitately. She was about to add "the great fortune he is to get," when she realized that she was taking this husband nothing — not even her own

heart. She went on, for the first time a little glad that she was penniless.

"He may find — neither fortune, nor position, nor heart awaiting him!" she finished pointedly.

The Maccabee pulled one of his stubborn locks that had fallen over his eyes. The smile grew less vivid.

He had no comment to make to this. Meanwhile Laodice looked at him.

"Shall — you be with — your friend in Jerusalem?" she asked.

"It depends on his wife," he retorted with a grimace.

She would be glad if this tall, comely trifler, with a voice as musical as some grave-toned viol, were to be seen from time to time to relieve the tedium of life with the offensive Philadelphus. This admission instantly brought a shock to her. She had learned to study herself in these last few days since she had become aware of the ways of the world. Life was to be no longer a period of obedience to laws which the Torah had laid down; it was to be a long resistance against desirable things that she yearned for but which she dared not have. She learned at this moment that she could be her own chief stumbling-block,

and that love, the most precious illumination in every life, might be a destruction and a consuming fire. She looked at this man, who lounged beside her, with a new sensation. He was winsome, and therefore the more perilous. That smooth insulting stranger whom this man had revealed as her husband with all his violence and license was a humble and harmless thing compared to this one, who had snared her by his care of her and by his charming self.

She felt a desire to cry out for Momus to take her back to the inner chamber of the shut house in Ascalon, away from her danger to herself and from the sight of the man who had done her no harm — yet.

She did not know how plainly all this wrote itself on her candid face. Wise pupil of that unbridled school, the city of Diana, he could read in that slight frown on her forehead and the pathetic curve of her lips, that she was contented with him — that she was not glad to go on to that husband in Jerusalem. He was near to her before she knew he had moved.

"After all," he was saying in a low voice, "I am glad you are going to Jerusalem. You shall not be lost from me again. Whose house shall I ask for when I can not endure separation longer?"

She moved away from him. There was a step behind her and Laodice, coloring shamedly, looked straight into the accusing eyes of Momus who stood there. The stranger rose.

"I shall see you again," he said to her.

He took her hand and lifted it to his lips. The next instant he was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

IMPERIAL CAESAR

When the Maccabee had returned to the spot in the sedgy valley where he and Julian had halted, he found the Ephesian white to the lips and with ignited eyes awaiting him.

"How much longer?" the Ephesian demanded.

"What! Fast and slow!" the Maccabee said calmly. "Last night you wasted hours to spite me. To-day you begrudge me a moment's talk with a lovely wayfarer. Or is it because she prefers me? You have ordered our progress long enough. I shall move when it pleases me."

He sat down by the fire, clasping his hands back of his head, and half-closed his eyes. The Ephesian rose and tramped restlessly about. As he glanced down at the reposeful attitude of the man whom he could not exasperate he saw the sun glitter on the Maccabaean signet on the hand clasped back of Philadelphus' head. The sight of it in a way collected

Julian's purposes. He knew that by some misadventure he had missed Aquila whom he had hoped to meet in Emmaus, bearing treasure stolen from the daughter of Costobarus. By this time, then, the Maccabee's emissary had doubtless arrived in Jerusalem — the last possible point for the two conspirators to meet. To proceed to Jerusalem without the Maccabee, with whatever excuse he could invent, would not deliver the dowry of the bride into his hands, in the event that Aquila had not succeeded in his instructions to make way with Laodice before he reached Jerusalem. Nothing occurred to Julian at that moment but to impersonate the Maccabee until it was possible to get possession of the two hundred talents from those friends in Jerusalem who were interested in his cousin's welfare. No one in Jerusalem knew Philadelphus Maccabaeus. Aquila, as fellow-conspirator, would not dare to expose him if Julian appeared as his cousin. Perilous at best, it seemed the only plan by which he was to get possession of a fortune which even Caesar would be glad to have.

The resolution formed itself in a brain turbulent with passion and desperation. He halted silently back of his cousin and with a sudden flare of intent

on his dead white face snatched a dagger from his girdle and drove it between the shoulders of the Maccabee. Without a word, Philadelphus turned upon his assailant and started to his feet. But Julian, catching a glimpse of the dire purpose in his cousin's darkened eyes, struck again. The knife, blindly wielded, glanced on the Maccabee's head with wild force. Under a veil of scarlet Philadelphus sank to the earth.

Julian with a sob of terror sprang out of range of his victim's gaze. After a time he took courage and looked. The lids were fallen and the breast was still.

Julian bent hastily and snatched the signet from the nerveless hand and fumbling in the bosom drew forth the wallet there. He opened it, finding within ancient parchments with heavy seals, new writings, rolls of notes and a packet of letters. He rose, trembling violently, and backed away. After a moment's fascinated gaze at the roadway to see if the pilgrims passing had seen what he had done, he whirled about, mounted his horse and galloped frantically toward Jerusalem.

Meanwhile the midday activity on the Roman road-

way swept by the smoldering fire and the motionless figure lying in the grass some distance back from the highway. Along the splendid causeway the Passover pilgrims fared, men afoot, men on camels, families and solitary travelers; the poor, the once rich, the humble and the haughty; figures in burnooses, gabardines, gowns and tunics; striped and checkered woolens, linens or rags; noisy or silent, angry or sad, hour in and hour out, until the hills were a-throb with the human atmosphere. Time and again the sweet invitation of the rare grass along the marsh invited the way-weary to halt to tie a sandal, to bind up a wound, to eat a crust spread with curds or simply to rest. No one approached the silent man who had fallen beside a dying fire. They were tired enough to refrain from disturbing a man who slept. So, though they looked at him from where they sat and two or three asked each other if he were asleep or merely weary, he was left alone. One by one they who halted took up their journey again and the figure in the grass lay still.

Finally near the noon hour there came from the summit of a hill overhanging the road, a high, wild, youthful yell that cut with startling distinctness

through the dead level of human communication on the highway. Each of the travelers below looked up to see a young shepherd in sheepskins with long-blowing stiff crinkled locks flying back from a dusky face, with eyes soft and shining as those of some wild thing. Around him eddied a mob of sheep as wild as he, and a Natolian dog raced hither and thither in a cloud of dust, rounding the edge of the flock and shaping it to the advance of the young faun that mastered it.

"Sheep! by the prophets!" one of the sedate Jews exclaimed.

"The only flock in existence in Judea, I venture!" his companion declared.

"And so hopelessly doomed to Roman possession that it can not be called in existence."

"Heigh! Hello! Young David!" one of the younger men called up to the shepherd. "Does Titus pay you for minding his mutton?"

"Salute, neighbors!" another shouted. "Here is the Roman commissary!"

"Ill-fathered son of an Ishmaelite!" a Tyrian said to this jester. "That you should make sport of Judea's humiliation!"

The shepherd who had paused amid his whirlpool of sheep wisely held his peace. There was a division of sentiment here that were better not aggravated. He halted long enough for the road to clear below him and then descended into the valley and crossed to the low meadow on the opposite side.

His scamper of sheep flocked into the sedge, parting around the prostrate figure by a circle of coals now dead, and plunged into the pasture. The boy inspected the earth and shook his head. It was too wet for a long stay, inviting as it seemed. But here his flock might pasture for a day without injury.

He glanced at the sleeper as he passed and continued to the farther side where the opposite hill sloped down into the depression. Here he found for himself a comfortable spot and lay down, prepared to watch all day. From time to time he looked across at the motionless figure in the grass and commented to himself that it was a weary man who slept so soundly, and then lost interest in the maze of dreams that can entangle the wits of a shepherd who is a boy.

The march of the Passover pilgrims continued to Jerusalem.

In mid-afternoon there came interruption. Along

the level highway came the rapid beat of hooves and the musical jingle of harness. Every soul within sound of that un-Jewish mode of travel turned apprehensively and looked back. Bearing down upon them from the west came a stampede of Roman cavalry scouting. The sunshine on their brass armor transformed them into shapes of gold, and the recklessness of their advance swept the pilgrims out of their path as far as could be seen. Right and left the Jews scattered; some ran into the hills and hid themselves; others merely stepped aside and with darkening faces waited defiantly for the approach of the oppressor. The young shepherd full of excitement sprang to his feet.

Neither the fleeing Jews nor the Jews that had stood their ground attracted the attention of the approaching legionaries. It was the close-packed, avid-feeding sheep, deep in the grass, that won their instant and enthusiastic notice. The decurion in charge of the squad brought up his gray horse with such suddenness that the animal's feet slid in the gravel.

"Sheep, by the wings of Mercury!" he shouted.

"Dismount, fellows! Here's for a feast this night and an offering to Mars to-morrow!"

The ten in brazen armor threw themselves from their horses with the enthusiasm of boys and spread a panic of whooping and of waving arms about the startled flock. The young shepherd, too long a fugitive from the encroachments of this same army to misunderstand the nature of the attack, ran into the thick of the shouting Romans. His valiant dog with exposed teeth flew straight at the nearest legionary.

"Cerberus!" the soldier howled, dodging. "Your pike, Paulus! Quick! By Hector, it is a wolf!"

But the quickest soldier would not have been quick enough to elude the enraged beast had not the shepherd with a spring and a warning cry seized his dog by the ears and stopped him mid-bound.

"Down, Urge!" he cried. "Take away your men!" he shouted to the decurion. "I can not hold him long."

"Only so long," Paulus growled, raising his pike over the snarling dog.

"Drop it!" the decurion ordered him peremptorily. "We are ten to one and a dog. No blood-

letting this day. It is Titus' order. Boy, get you gone; these sheep are confiscate."

"I have been told they are only common stock," the boy remonstrated gravely, "but you may be right. Howbeit, they are not mine and I can not leave them."

"You have been misinformed," the decurion said gravely, while his men, circling around the growling dog, went on with their work. "These are Roman sheep, with the Flavian coat of arms and the mark of the army in black on their hides — if you shear them. But if you make away as fast as you can I shall not tell Titus which way you went."

The sheep had started pell-mell toward the Roman road. The decurion turned back to his horse. The shepherd released his dog, which ran after the flock, and stepped into the decurion's way.

"However these sheep look when they are sheared," he said, "this seems to be robbery to me."

"Robbery!" the good-natured decurion exclaimed. "This is but a religious rite that Mercury got out of the cradle at two days to establish. Only he took Apollo's cattle while we are contenting ourselves with

the sheep of mortal ownership. Robbery! What an inelegant word!"

Meanwhile the stampeded sheep were making in a cloud of dust back over the road toward the west from which the Romans had come.

"What shall I say to the citizens of Pella?" the little shepherd shouted, pursuing the decurion who was making back to his horse as fast as he could go.

"Salute them for me," the decurion shouted back, "and make them my obeisances, and say that I shall report on the flavor of the sheep by messenger from Jerusalem."

In a moment the boy sprang into the decurion's way so suddenly that the soldier almost fell over him.

"Be fair!" the boy exclaimed. "At least leave me half!"

The decurion was losing patience and the shepherd had grown more than ever serious.

"Fair!" the Roman echoed. "Why, I have been indulgent! This is war! It is almost a breach of discipline to argue with you. Out of the way!"

"The Roman army has all the world to feed it; Pella has only its sheep. We, then, must face hunger

and cold because your appetites crave mutton this day!" the boy returned resentfully.

The decurion pointed down the road.

"Why waste your breath! There go the sheep."

The boy's dark eyes filled with tears. The decurion swung around him and went back to the horses that waited in the road. He knotted their bridles together and, leading one of the number, remounted and rode west after the receding cloud of dust which hid the flock.

The shepherd's head sank on his heaving breast and he stood still.

"Lord Jesus, I pray Thee, give me my sheep again!" he prayed.

A deep prolonged thunder that had been filling the hills with sound began to multiply as the nearest slopes caught it and tossed it from echo to echo. It was not loud but immensely prevalent. Those wayfarers who had fled came back to the brink of the hill and those who had stood their ground walked out into the grass to look back. Around the curve of a buttress of rock that stood out at the line of the road, the head of a column of Roman cavalry appeared.

The superb color-bearer bore on his hip the staff supporting the Imperial standard.

At the forefront rode a young general; on either side a tribune. Behind came a detachment of six hundred horse.

The sheep huddling in the way were swept like a scurry of leaves out into the meadow alongside the road, and one of the tribunes and the general turned in their saddles to look at the confiscated flock. The second tribune observed their interest in this trivial incident with disgust. The young general, whose military cloak flaunted a purple border, called the decurion boyishly:

"Well done, Sergius! A samnos of wine for your company to-night for this."

The decurion saluted.

"Where did you get them?" the tribune demanded.

The shepherd who had withdrawn to the side of the road on the approach of the column looked at the questioner with resentful eyes from which the moisture had not vanished.

"From me!" he said.

Both the purple-wearing young general and his tribune looked at him amusedly.

"How many killed and wounded, Sergius?" the tribune asked.

The silent and disapproving tribune, observing that the commanding officer had not given an order to halt, brought the six hundred to, lest they ride their general down.

"You!" the general exclaimed with his eyes on the young shepherd.

The boy looked up into the face of the Roman who sat above him on a snow-white horse.

It was a young face, tanned by the sun of Alexandria, but bright with an emanation of light that somehow was made tangible by the flash of his teeth as he talked and the sparkle of his lively eyes. For a soldier exposed to the open air and the ruffian life of the camp and burdened with the grave task of subduing a desperate nation, he was free of disfigurements. His brows were knitted as if to give his full soft eyes protection and the frown, with the laughing cut of his youthful lips, gave his face a quizzical expression that was entirely winning. In countenance and figure he was handsome, refined and thoroughly Roman.

The little shepherd was won to him instantly. Without knowing that the world from one border to the other had already named this charming young Roman the Darling of Mankind, the little shepherd, had his lips been shaped to poetry, would have called him that.

So Joseph, the shepherd, son of Thomas, the Christian, and Titus, son of Vespasian, Emperor of the World, looked at each other with perfect fellowship.

"Those are sheep from Pella," Joseph said soberly, "in my care. They were taken from me because," he paused till a more tactful statement should suggest itself, but, lacking it, drove ahead with spirit, "there was not more of me to stop your soldiers."

"I believe you," Titus replied heartily. "But that is the fortune of war. Still, you Jews have a habit of refusing to accept defeat rationally."

"I am not a Jew," Joseph explained. "I am born of Arab blood, and I am a Christian."

"Worse and worse," said Titus.

Joseph shifted his position argumentatively.

"Is it?" he asked. "Are you making war on Pella or Jerusalem? Was it Pella or the hundred

Jewish towns that cost Rome so much of late? Pella is not exactly your friend, though neither are most of your provinces; but are you going to pillage Egypt or Persia because Judea is in rebellion?"

Titus threw his plump leg over the horn of his saddle and sat sidewise. One of his tribunes looked at the other with a flickering smile that was not entirely free of contempt. But his fellow returned a stare that for immobility would have done credit to the Memnon.

"Now," Titus began, "I have heard of this fault in the Christians. They don't understand warfare."

"We don't," Joseph declared bluntly. "We do not see why you should take my sheep to feed your army, when we have had nothing to do with bringing your army over here. We haven't cost you one drop of Roman blood or one denarius of Roman money, and yet you are taking at one act the whole of our substance and punishing us for the misdeeds of others — others whom you haven't succeeded in punishing yet."

"That is bad judgment," Titus said, frowning at the last sentence.

"Unpleasant truth always is," Joseph retorted.

One of the tribunes laughed impulsively and Titus looked around at him reproachfully.

"Come, come, Carus," he said.

"Thy pardon, Cæsar," the tribune replied, "but we'll be whipped in this wordy battle. And even a small defeat were an unpropitious sign on this expedition."

"To Hades with your signs! If I am whipped with six hundred back of me, I ought to be! Boy, we have your sheep by conquest; you will have to take them back the same way."

Joseph's face fell.

"I have had them since I was nine years old. I've tended them since they were lambs and their mothers before them. It is like surrendering so many children," he said dejectedly. "In truth I can fight for them even if it be but to lose, and I am bidden not to fight at that."

"By Hector, that is not a Jewish tenet!" Titus exclaimed.

Joseph said nothing. He stood still in the path of the Roman six hundred with his curly head sunk on his breast. There was silence.

"Is it?" Titus demanded uncomfortably.

"No; and for that reason you are still fighting them and will fight and lose and lose and lose, before you win. Still, it is no safeguard not to fight you; you take our substance anyhow. Be we peace-lovers or not, there is warfare; if we do not fight we are fought against."

Titus thrust his helmet back from his full front of intensely black curls and wiped his forehead.

"The sun is hot in these hills," he said disjointedly to the tribune he had called Carus, "and the wind is cold. Uncomfortable climate."

Carus said nothing.

"Is it not?" Titus demanded irritably.

"Very," Carus observed hastily.

The little shepherd stood in the road and the six hundred were silent.

"Well," said Titus with a tone of finality, "you never remember the wrongs the strong man endured — wrongs that the weak man did him because of his weakness."

"It never hurts the strong man," Joseph said softly, "to give the weak one another chance."

Titus closed his lips at that, and the tribune who had smiled sarcastically looked with sudden intent at

Carus. Carus silently moved his horse to the sarcastic tribune's side with such threatening expression on his face that the other discreetly held his peace.

"Perhaps," Titus said thoughtfully, but the boy failed to see more in that word than the simple expression. In his search for some further plea that would give him his sheep again, the presence of the young Roman appealed to him with hope. Surely one so young and laughing, so ready to stop an army to argue with a child, could not be beyond reach of persuasion. With the simple frankness so innocent of guile as to make charming that which upon other lips would have been the broadest insincerity, he put that moment's thought into words.

"I thought," he said slowly, "because your horse is so white and your dress so golden and your face so beautiful that I would have but to ask — and I would have my sheep again."

Titus looked at him, not with the idea that his compliment was effective, but with the thought that the boy was yet too young to have lost faith in attractive things; that another than himself would have to teach the shepherd that lesson in disappointment.

"Have you examined these sheep for disease, Ser-

gius?" he demanded, with a show of severity. "I never saw a flock in this country that was not full of peril for the cavalry."

Sergius, wisely catching excuse in this demand, saluted.

"I did not," he replied.

"So? Well, do it hereafter. Go stop those legionaries and turn loose that flock. We lost five hundred horse in Cæsarea for just such negligence."

Joseph flung up his head, his eyes sparkling, his cheeks aglow, his whole figure alive with a gratitude so potent that it was painful. Titus, with the deep tide of a blush crawling over his forehead, scowled down at this joy.

"Look well," he continued severely to Sergius, "and if they are healthy —"

But Joseph laughed and stepped out of the young general's path.

"And," said Titus, his face clearing before that laugh as he directed his words to the little shepherd, "Jerusalem shall have another chance."

Transfiguration brightened the small dusky face. He put up his hands for that blessing that was a part of his farewell.

"*May my God supply all thy need according to his riches in glory, by Jesus Christ. Amen!*"

Titus, with a bowed head, touched his horse, and in response to a silent flash of an uplifted sword the picked six hundred of Cæsar's army rode on in the subdued thunder of hoof and the music of jingling harness toward Jerusalem.

After a long time there came the quick patter of a running flock and the multitudinous complaint of lambs, and up from the east rushed the mob of sheep. Behind them trotting comfortably were the mounted scouts. The ten privates wore scornful countenances highly expressive of their contempt for the unwarlike restitution they had been forced to make, but as they rode past when the sheep swept out of the road to their tender, Sergius, the decurion, dropped back and with his tongue in his cheek made such jovial threatening signs that the little shepherd laughed again.

The squad galloped after the main body and were lost to view. Many of the Jews called to the little shepherd, but after a time travel was resumed on the road and deep monotonous composure settled upon the valley again.

But Joseph, the Christian, turned into the high grass of the meadow with bowed head and clasped hands.

"Lord Jesus, what may I do for Thee?" he asked impulsively.

He stopped suddenly. At his feet lay the silent sleeper in the grass. On the tall growth upstanding about the prostrate form were clear shining scarlet drops. The little shepherd turned white and threw himself down on his knees beside the still figure and put his hand over the heart. Then he lifted his face to the skies.

"*I was sick and ye visited me,*" he whispered radiantly.

He threw himself down by the still figure.—*Page 168*

CHAPTER VIII

GREEK AND JEW

Julian of Ephesus, now the presumptive Philadelphus Maccabaeus, rode up the broad brown bosom of a hill that had confronted him for miles to the south, and the sun had sloped until its early spring rays struck level from the west. At the summit, he drew up his horse suddenly with a quick intaking of the breath.

Below him lay Jerusalem.

South and east the barren summits of brown hills shaped a depression in which the city lay. North, clean-white and regular, the wall of Agrippa was printed against the cold blue of the sky. Below on three lesser mounts and overflowing the vales between was the goodliest city in all Asia.

About it and through it climbed such walls, planted on such bold natural escarpment, that made it the most inaccessible fortification in the world. On its

highest hill stood a vision of marble and gold — a fortress in gemstone — the Temple. Behind it towered Roman Antonia. Westward the Tyropean Bridge spanned a deep, populous ravine. The high broad street upon which the giant causeway terminated was marked by the solemn cenotaphs of Mariamne and Phaselis and ended against the Tower of Hippicus — a vast and unflinching citadel of stone. Under the shadow of this pile was the high place of the Herods; in sight was a second Herodian palace. South was the open space of the great markets; near the southernmost segment of the outer wall was the semicircular Hippodrome. Cut off from its neighbor by ancient walls were Ophlas, overlooking Tophet and under the shadow of the Temple; Mount Zion which the Lord had established, Akra of the valley, Moriah, the Holy Hill, and Coenopolis or Bezetha which Agrippa I had walled. About the immense outer fortifications crawled the shadowy valleys of Tophet, of Brook Kedron and of Hinnom. Thickly scattered like fallen patches of skies the pools of Siloam, Gihon, Shiloh, En-Rogel, the Great Pool, the Serpent's Pool and the Dragon's Well reflected the color of the mountain heavens. Between them

wandered the blue threads of certain aqueducts that supplied them. Everywhere rose the shafts of monuments and memorials, old as the pride of Absalom, new as the folly of the Herods; everywhere the aggressive paganism of Rome and Greece, which would have paganized this monotheistic race out of very rancor against its uprightness, violated with insolent beauty the hieratic severity of the city's face. Rich, bold, strong, beautiful, Jerusalem was at that hour, as viewed from the hill to the north, the perfection of beauty and the joy of the whole earth.

For a moment ambition struggled nobly in the breast of the man that overlooked it. Except for the obstacles he had placed in his own way by his misdeeds, Julian of Ephesus at that moment might have become great. But he had struck down his kinsman on the way, and such deeds were remembered even in war-ridden Judea; he had come to Jerusalem wearing his kinsman's name that he might despoil that kinsman's bride of her dowry; a hundred other crimes of his commission stood in the way to peace and success.

But about him the Passover pilgrims, catching their first glimpse of the Holy City, gave way to the

storm of emotion that had gradually gathered as they drew near to the threatened City of Delight.

It had moved him to look upon this most majestic fortification, embattled and begirt for resistance against the most majestic nation in the world. But he who came as a stranger could not feel within him the tenderness of old love, the sanctity of old tradition, and the desperation of kin in his blood as he gazed upon Jerusalem. Yonder was a roof-garden; to him, no more than that. But the inspired Jews beside him knew that in that place the sun of noon had shone upon Bathsheba, the beautiful; and in that neighboring high place the heart of the Singing King had melted; to the north was a stretch of monotonous ground overgrown with a new suburb; but that was the camp of Sennacherib, the Assyrian whom the Angel of the Lord smote and his army of one hundred and four score and five thousand, before the morning. Yonder were squalid streets, older than any others. But the Kings had walked them; the Prophets had helped wear trenches in their stones; the heroes and the strong-hearted women of the ancient days had gone that way. No house but was holy with tradition; no street but was sanctified by

event. Small wonder, then, that these who came to this Passover, the most momentous one since that calamity which had occurred forty years ago on Golgotha, wept, cried aloud to Heaven; became beatified and made prophecies; railed; anathematized Jerusalem's enemies; assumed vows and were threatening. Julian of Ephesus was shaken. He looked about him on the tempestuous host, then touched his horse and rode down to the city.

On the Hill Scopus over which he approached an inferior number of Romans were camped, and these had maintained a semblance of siege only sufficiently effective to close all the gates on three sides. The Sun Gate to the south of the city was therefore the most accessible point of entry for the pilgrims. Following the people who had preceded him, Julian approached this portal, left his horse with the stable-keeper without and prepared to enter Jerusalem.

Collecting at the causeway of the Sun Gate the pilgrims came with such impetus that the foremost were rushed struggling and protesting through the tunnel under the wall and forced well into Jerusalem before they could control their own motion. Once within, the host spread out so that one looking at the

immense space they instantly covered wondered how so great a mass ever passed through the circumscribed limits of a fifty-foot gate. At times stopping was impossible. Again there were momentary lulls, as when the sea recoils upon itself and is stilled for an instant. They who stood to watch, wearied of days of such invasion, unconsciously wished that the interval might endure till they could rest their number-wearied brains. But, as if the stagnation were the result of congestion somewhere without the walls, when the wave returned it came with redoubled height and power and the Sun Gate would roar with the noise of their entry.

After the Ephesian had been swept in with his own company of pilgrims, he saw that which even few of the new-comers had expected to see. The immediate vicinity of the gate was laid waste. Up Mount Zion opposite Hippicus and along the margin of the Tyropean Valley where the Herodian and Sadducean palaces had seemed so fair from the north were great blackened shells of walls and leaning pillars, partly buried in ruin and rubbish. Far and wide the streets were littered with debris and charred fragments of burned timbers. At another place on the breast of

Zion was a chaos of rock where a mansion had been literally pulled down. Somewhere near Akra pale columns of pungent, wind-blown smoke still rose from a colossal heap of fused matter that the Ephesian could not identify. About it were neglected houses; not a sign of festivity was apparent; windows hung open carelessly; the hangings in colonnades were stripped away entirely or whipped loose from the fastenings and abandoned to the winds. Numbers of dwellings appeared to have been sacked; others were so closely barred and fortified that their exteriors appeared as inhospitable as jails.

Confusion prevailed on the smoked and untidy marble Walk of the Purified leading down from the Temple. Here those who held fast to the Law met and contested for their old exclusiveness with wild heathen Idumean soldiers, starvelings, ruffians and strange women from out-lying towns. Far and wide were wandering crowds, surly, defiant, discourteous, exacting. Manifestly it was the visitors who were the aggressors. They had been overthrown and driven from their own into an unsubjugated city which was secure. They felt the rage of the defeated which are not subdued, and the resentment against

another's unearned immunity. The citizens of Jerusalem had not welcomed them and they were enraged. Half a dozen fights of more or less seriousness were in sight at once. A column of black wiry men in some semblance of uniform pushed across the open space toward the Essene Gate. They took no heed for any in their path. Those who could not escape were overturned and trampled on. Meeting a rush at the gate they drew swords and coolly hacked their way through screams of fear and pain and amazement. After them went a wave of curses and complaint. Citizens against the visitors; visitors against the citizens; soldiers against them all!

"And this cousin of mine meant to pacify all this!" the Ephesian exclaimed to himself.

Jerusalem, that had for fifteen hundred years adorned herself at this time with tabrets and had gone forth in the dance of them that make merry, was drunken with wormwood and covered with ashes.

All at once the Ephesian saw four soldiers standing together and with them, manifestly under their protection, was a Greek of striking beauty. He wore on his fine head a purple turban embroidered with a golden star.

Without a moment's hesitation, the Ephesian approached. The spears of the four soldiers fell and formed a barrier around the Greek. The new-comer smiled confidently.

"Greeting, servant of Amaryllis," he said. "I am your lady's expected guest."

The Greek came forth from the square formed by his guard.

"I am that servant of Amaryllis," he said courteously. "But show me yet another sign."

The Ephesian drew from his bosom the Maccabaean signet and flashed its blue fires at the Greek. The servant stepped hastily between the soldiers and the new-comer.

"Thy name?" he asked in a whisper.

"I am Philadelphus Maccabaeus."

The servant bent and taking the hem of the woolen tunic pressed it to his lips.

"Happy hour!" he exclaimed. "I pray you follow me."

The pretender breathed a relieved sigh and joined his protector.

They passed down into Akra and approached the straight column of pungent smoke towering up from

a charred heap that the Ephesian in spite of his haste inspected curiously.

"What is that?" he asked of the Greek.

"That, master, is the city granaries."

"The granaries!" the Ephesian cried, aghast.

The Greek inclined his head.

"What — what — fired them?" the Ephesian asked.

"John and Simon differed on the point of its control and each fired it to keep the other from possessing it!"

For a moment the Ephesian was thunderstruck. Then he quickened his pace.

"By the horns of Capricornus!" he avowed. "The sooner one gets out of this, the wiser he must be counted!"

The Greek looked at him with lifted brows and led on.

They crossed the Tyropean Valley and approached a small new house of stone, abutting the vast retaining wall that was built against Moriah. A line of soldiers was thrown out from the entrance to the house and his conductor, after whispering a word to the captain, led the way up to a double-barred door.

A long time after he had rapped, there was the sound of falling chains and the door swung open. A second Greek servant of no less beauty bowed the new-comer and his companion within. The noise of the streets was suddenly cut off. Soft dusk and quiet proved that the doors of Amaryllis had been shut upon unhappy Jerusalem.

The second servant drew a cord and a roller of matting lifted and showed a skylight. Philadelphus the pretender was in the andronitis of a Greek house.

It was typical. None but a Greek with the purest taste had planned it. Walls and pavement were of unpolished marble, lusterless white. A marble exedra built in a semicircle sat in the farther end, facing a chair wholly of ivory set beside a lectern of dull brass. At either end of the exedra on a pedestal formed by the arms, a brass staff upheld a flat lamp that cast its luster down on the seat by night. Against an opposite wall built at full length of the hall, was a pigeonholed case, which was stacked with brass cylinders. This was the library of the Greek. At a third side was a compound arch concealed by a heavy white curtain. There were low couches spread with costly white material which were used

when Amaryllis set her table in her andronitis, and at the arches leading into the interior of the house there were draperies. But the chamber, with all its richness, had a splendid emptiness that made it imposing, not luxurious.

After a single admiring survey of the hall in which he had been left alone, the pretended Philadelphus fortified himself against his most critical test.

Without a sound, without even so much as the rustling of a garment to announce her, a woman emerged from a passage leading into the interior of the house. He confronted the only person in Jerusalem who might know him as an impostor.

The woolen chiton of her countrywomen draped a figure almost too slender, yet perfect in its delicate modeling. Though her eyes were black, her hair was fair and brilliant with a wash of gold powder. Her features were Hellenic, cold, pure and classic, and for all her youth and beauty there was an atmosphere about her of middle-age, immense experience, and old sagacity.

The pretender braced himself for the scrutiny the eyes made of him.

"You are that Philadelphus, as my servant tells me?" she asked.

"I am he."

She inclined her head.

"Welcome; in the name of all the need of you!"

After a silence he came closer and lifted her hand to his lips. He added nothing, but presently raised his eyes softened with feeling and unexpressed appreciation.

"Certainly you have suffered, lady," he said finally in a subdued tone. "But please God you will not suffer alone hereafter."

Amaryllis' non-committal front changed.

"You are gentler of speech than is common among the Maccabees," she said.

"Nevertheless the Maccabees are the more touched by devotion," he maintained.

He led her to the exedra, unslung his wallet and laid it on the lectern before them.

"When thou hast leisure, perchance thou wilt find interest in these papers here."

She thanked him and there was a moment's silence. Under his lashes the impostor saw that he had not

filled her fancied picture of the Maccabee made from long years of correspondence. She was disappointed; her intuition was perplexed. He would complete his work and get away in time.

"My wife is here?" he asked.

"She came yesterday," Amaryllis responded, clapping her hands in summons. A female servant of such prepossessing appearance that Philadelphus looked at her again, bowed in the archway.

"Send hither the princess," Amaryllis said.

"The princess," Philadelphus repeated to himself. "Then, by Ate, I am the prince!"

"While we wait," Amaryllis continued, "let us talk of details which you may not have patience to hear after she comes. Jerusalem, as you have learned, is in grave danger —"

"Jerusalem should fear the Roman army less than herself. I have seen its disease."

"The citizens will hail Titus as a deliverer. But this week's ceremonies are bringing us disaster. Should Titus be forced to lay siege about us, how shall we feed this multitude of a million on the supplies gathered for only a third of that number?"

"Gathered and burned."

"Even so. But of your creature comforts. My house is open to your chief enemy. It must be so. You must be hidden — not concealed, but disguised. You know my weakness for people of charm and people of ability. My house is full of them. The master of this place is indulgent; he permits me to add to my collection whatever pleases me in the way of society. Therefore, you are come as a student of this wonderful drama to be enacted in Jerusalem presently. You may live under part of your name. Substitute, however, your city for your surname. Be Philadelphus of Ephesus. No one then will question your presence here.

"I have bound to me by oath and by fear one hundred Idumeans who will rise or fall with you. They are of John's own army and alienated to you without his knowledge. Hence they are in armor and ready at any propitious moment. This house is provisioned and equipped for siege; everything is prepared."

"At what cost, my Amaryllis?" he asked tenderly.

She drew away from him quickly, as if his tone had touched a place of deeper disappointment.

"That I do not remember. I am your minister; you need no other. More than the one would be multiplying chances for betrayal."

"And what wilt thou have out of all this for thyself?" he asked.

Slowly she turned her face back to him.

"I would have it said that I made a king," she said.

There was a step in the corridor leading into the andronitis, and, smiling, Amaryllis rose. Philadelphus got upon his feet and looked to catch the first glimpse of the woman who was bringing him two hundred talents.

A woman entered the hall. Behind her came a servant bearing a shittim-wood casket.

Had Amaryllis been looking for suspicious signs, she would have observed in the intense silence that fell, in the arrested attitude of the pair, more than a natural embarrassment. Any one informed that these were a pair of impostors would have seen that there was no confusion here, but amazement, chagrin and no little fear.

Instead, Amaryllis, nothing suspecting, glanced from one set face to the other and laughed.

"Poor children! Married fourteen years and

more than strangers to each other! I will take myself off until you recover."

She signed to the servant to follow her and passed out of the hall.

Philadelphus then put off his stony quiet and gazed wrathfully at the woman who had entered.

Hers was a fine frame, broad and square of shoulder, tall and lank of hip as some great tiger-cat, and splendid in its sinuosity. She had walked with a long stride and as she dropped into the chair she crossed her limbs so that her well-turned ankles showed and the hands she clasped about her knees were long and strong, white and remarkably tapering. Her features were almost too perfect; her beauty was sensuous, insolent and dazzling. Withal her presence intimated tremendous primal charm and the mystery of undiscovered potentialities. And she was royal! No mere upstart of an impostor could have assumed that perfect hauteur, that patrician bearing.

But the pretended Philadelphus was not impressed by this beauty.

"How now, Salome?" he demanded. "What play is this?"

The Ephesian actress motioned toward the shittim-wood casket.

"For that," she said calmly.

Her voice became, instantly, her foremost charm. It was a deep voice; the profoundest contralto with an illimitable strength in suggestion.

"Where is — what is that?"

"Two hundred talents."

Philadelphus took a step toward her.

"What!" he exclaimed evilly. "Whose two hundred talents?"

"Mine."

There was silence in which the man's fingers bent, as if he felt her throat between them. Then he recovered himself.

"But — this woman — where is she?"

The actress lifted her shapely shoulders.

"Where is the Maccabee?" she asked in return.

He made no answer.

"Did you get that treasure here — since yesterday?" he asked at last querulously.

"No, by Pluto! I got it in the hills near to Emmaus. You would have had it in another day." She

laughed impudently, in spite of the murderous blackening in his face.

"Then, since you are such a shrewd thief, why did you come here at all, since you had the gold?" he demanded, astonished in spite of his rage.

She waved a pair of jeweled hands.

"They said that the Maccabee was strong and ambitious and forceful, that he would be king over Judea. Knowing you, I believed he would still come to Jerusalem in spite of you. How did you do it? In his sleep? Now, I," she continued with an assumption of concern, "failed in that detail. She was guarded by a monster. I could not get near her. But I got the casket."

"She will come here then!" Philadelphus exclaimed.

"What of it! Amaryllis does not know her; no one else does. And I have her proofs — and her dowry!"

After a silence in which she read the expression on his face, she rose and came near him with determination in her manner.

"You will have the wisdom not to recognize her,"

she said, "lest I suddenly discover that you are not the Philadelphus I expected."

He made rapid survey of her advantage over him, and submitted.

"But there will be no need of waiting for such an issue," he fumed, after a silence. "I am here and not the Maccabee, whose crown you coveted. We shall get out of this perilous city."

"So?" she said, lifting her finely penciled brows. "No, we shall not."

"Why?" he stormed.

"Because," she answered, "John of Gischala may yet be king of Judea — and John hath a queen's diadem for sale at two hundred talents — or a heart which I can have for nothing."

There was malevolent and impotent silence in the andronitis of Amaryllis, the Greek.

CHAPTER IX

THE YOUNG TITUS

They who stood on the wall by the Tower of Psephinos in Coenopolis of Jerusalem on a day in March, 70 A. D., saw prophecy fulfilled.

Since the hour in which the Roman eagles had appeared above the horizon to the west in their circling over the rebellious province of Judea there had not been one day of peace. Then their coming had meant the approach of an enemy. But in a short time such implacable and fierce oppressors, with such genius for ferocity and bloodshed, had developed among the Jews' own factions that the miserable citizens had turned to the tyrant Rome for rescue. They who had risen against Florus and had driven him out would have willingly accepted him again in place of Simon bar Gioras and John of Gischala, before two years had elapsed. Now, their plight was so desperate that they clambered daily upon the walls of their unhappy city to look for the first glimpse

of the approaching enemy, Titus, whom they had learned to call the Deliverer.

Near noon of this day in March certain citizens on the wall beside Hippicus saw a flash down the road to the west beyond the Serpent's Pool near Herod's monuments. Again they saw it and again, until they observed that its appearance was rhythmic, striking through a soft colored cloud of Judean dust.

Out of that yellow haze, rolling nearer, they saw now the glittering Roman standards emerge, one by one; saw the spiky level of shouldered spears; saw the shapes of horses, saw the shapes of men; heard the soft thunder of six hundred horse on the packed earth, heard the music of six hundred whetting harnesses; heard like a tender, far-off song the winding of a Roman bugle and heard then in their own hearts, the shout: "He has come! The Deliverer!"

It was the hour of the City's last hope.

On the near side of the Pool of the Serpent, they saw the body of horse break into a light trot and, wheeling in that fine concord in which even the dumb beasts were perfect, turn the broadside of the splendid column to Jerusalem as it swept up Hill Gareb to the north.

The citizens clambered down from the wall by Hippicus and, speeding silently but with moving lips and shining eyes through alleys and byways, came finally to an angle in Agrippa's wall that stood out toward Gareb. Here was built the Tower of Psephinos. Dumb and callous as beasts to the blows and commands of the sentries there mounted, the citizens clambered up on the fortifications and, with their chins on the battlements that stood shoulder-high, gazed avidly at the sight they saw.

Scattered confidently over the uneven country the six hundred had broken file and were in easy disarray all over Gareb. Spears were at rest, standards grounded, many were dismounted, whole companies slouched in their saddles. The Jews, long used to rigid military discipline among the Romans, looked in amazement. Then a light click of a hoof attracted their attention to the bridle-path immediately under the overhanging battlements.

There a solitary horseman rode. Not a scale of armor was upon his horse; not a weapon, not even a shield depended from his harness. His head was uncovered and a sheeny purple fillet showed in the tumbled, dusty black hair. There was no guard on the

hand that held the bridle; the cloak that floated from his shoulders was white wool; the tunic was the simple light garment that soldiers usually wear under armor; the shoes alone were mailed. It seemed that the young Roman had stripped off his helmet, breastplate and greaves to ride less encumbered or to appear less warlike.

But the Jews who looked at him understood. Here was Titus come in peace!

The horse went with loosened rein, while the young Roman's eyes raised to the great wall towering over him had more of admiration and a generous foe's appreciation of his enemy's strength than of the note-making search of a spy in them.

"Ha! By Hector, that penurious Herod was a builder!" they seemed to say. "There is enough stone insolence in these walls to trouble Rome for a while!"

Rod after rod of the slowly rising ground he traversed; rod after rod of the tall fortification passed under his inspection, and now the twin Women's Towers rose upon the ashes and scarped rock to the north.

Titus spoke to his horse and rode faster.

Meanwhile silent dozens climbed panting and dumbly resisting the sentries up beside the first Jews. They were citizens who dared not rejoice aloud. They followed the young Roman with brightened eyes, saying each within his heart:

"Thus David came up against Saul, unto Israel!"

But there was an increase of uproar in the city below, as if news of the coming of Titus had spread abroad.

Titus was now almost a mile from the nearest of his soldiers. He passed the Gate of the Women's Towers. Hedges, gardens, ditches and wind-breaks of cedars of Lebanon from time to time obscured him. When he came in sight again, he had placed obstruction between himself and retreat.

The next instant the Gate of the Women's Towers swung in. Out of it rushed a sortie of motley soldiery, brandishing weapons and shouting the war-cries of Simon and John.

The citizens on the walls pressed their hands to their temples and watched, transfixed with horror. Jerusalem's defenders had gone out against the Deliverer!

The attack had been seen by the disorganized

troops on Gareb and the rapid trumpet-calls showed formation. But between the time of their movement and the moment of their relief a company could have been unhorsed. Meanwhile Titus, with nothing less than Fate preserving him for its own work, dodged javelins and, enraging the white stallion that he rode, kept out of reach of hand-to-hand encounter with his assailants. Back and forward he rode, his horse carrying him at times out of range of missiles; again, all but surrounded by the unorganized enemy. About his head whizzed axes and spears, wild, and frequently slaying their own. Far up the slope of Gareb the six hundred gathered itself and swept in mass down upon the conflict.

Between them and Titus lay two furlongs. To join his column with all honor to himself, he had to work back over the wadies he had crossed and circle the gardens that stood in his way. But a hedge pressed too close upon the space he must pass, between it and the enemy, before he could return to his men. An ax glanced beside his ear; he wavered in his saddle. Then, that happened which a Roman of that day could not be forced to do and forget.

Titus wheeled his horse and, plunging his spurs

into its sides, fled on into the open country to the north, with the jeers of the men of Simon and John following him.

His troops rushed down upon his assailants. But the wary soldiers turned when the Roman had fled and the Gate of the Women's Towers closed upon them.

Up from the visitors within the wall rose a shout:

"A sign, a sign! An omen! Thus shall the children of God overthrow the heathen in battle!"

But one of the Jews on the wall thrust his fingers under his turban and seized his hair.

"Jerusalem is fallen! Woe! Woe to the wicked city!"

He turned in his place and leaped a good twenty feet to the ground. When he raised himself the look of a maniac had settled on his face. Tearing his garments from him as he went, he entered a narrow street that made its ascent toward Zion by steps and cobbled slants. Here he came upon great crowds of terror-stricken citizens who had rushed together as the news spread abroad over Jerusalem that the men of Simon and John had gone out against the Deliverer. No definite news of the outcome of the sortie had reached them and they were moving in a dense

pack down toward the walls to hear the worst. The whole hurrying mass seemed to vibrate with suspense and dread. The maniac met them.

"Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" he cried.

A lean, apish, half-naked, lash-scarred idiot in the street, instantly, as if in echo to that mad cry, shouted in a voice of the most prodigious volume:

"A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the Holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides and a voice against this whole people!"

The temper of the crowd had reached that point of tension that needed only a little more strain to become panic. Some one received the discordant cries of the maniacs with piercing rapid screams. Instantly the choked passage filled with frantic uproar. Scores attempting to flee blindly trampled over those transfixed with fear. They fought, men with women, youths with old age, children with one another. Hundreds attracted by the tumult rushed in on the panic and added fresh victims and new death. Out of the horror rose the fearful cries of the madmen:

"Woe, woe to this wicked city!"

Meanwhile, the soldiers of Simon and John came

to prevent citizens from gathering in bodies, and with sword and spear drove into the struggle and added murder to it all. The spirit of terror then issued out of that bloody alley and seized upon street by street. Far and wide the tumult ran, growing in volume with every accession, until the raging and humiliated Titus, among his six hundred, heard Jerusalem howl like a beaten slave and hushed his pagan curses to listen.

Late that same afternoon, the Esquiline Gate, inaccessible, despised and sealed, was broken open from within and under it and down its difficult and dangerous approach poured a silent multitude, numbering thousands. They were abandoning the Rock of David to its fate. Among them went the last remnants of that sect of Christians who had tarried long after their brethren had been warned away, hoping against hope.

They were not missed among the numbers in Jerusalem, for the Passover hosts still poured through the gates to the south and took their places in the unhappy city. And with these that same afternoon Laodice and her old servant came into Jerusalem.

It was the eighth day after they had applied to

the priest at Emmaus whither they had fled in their search for the frosts, a good three leagues north of the direct road to Jerusalem. They had stopped at the Lavatory outside the walls, washed themselves and had purchased the white garments of the purified. Old Momus carried with him the price of the lambs, of the fine flour and the oil for their cleansing and the two were ready to present themselves for their purification at the Temple. But all the roar and disorder of the great city in its warfare and its discord confused them. Ascalon had not a thousandth part of this turmoil at its busiest season. Neither was there a servant in a purple turban with the gold star to meet them and they were bewildered and lost.

The rest of the visitors to the Passover hurried into the heart of the city; wave after wave of newcomers replaced them; but the young woman and her dumb old servant stood aside just within reach of the shadow of the immemorial portal and waited.

Time and again wolfish Idumean soldiers who were numerous about the place noted the pair and commented to one another or spoke insolently to the shrinking girl who hid ineffectually behind her veil. Hour after hour they stood with growing distress and

no friendly face in all that army of hurrying, restless, quarreling Jews welcomed them.

The afternoon waned. Laodice thought of the darkness and trembled.

An old man fumbling a talisman of bone drew near them. Laodice took courage and approached him.

"I pray thee, sir, I seek Amaryllis, the Seleucid."

The old man turned large, grave eyes upon her.

"Daughter, what dost thou know of this woman?" he asked.

"My husband knows her; I do not. I am to join him under her roof."

The old man looked reassured.

"Follow this street unto one intersecting it on the summit of Zion. That will be a broad street and a straight one, terminating on a bridge. Go thence to the hither side of that bridge, pass down the ravine and cross to the other side against Moriah. There thou shalt see a new Greek house. It is the residence of Amaryllis."

Laodice thanked her informant and began the pursuit of the cloudy directions to her destination. Twice before she brought up at the sentry line before the house of the Seleucid, she asked further of other

citizens. Many times she met affront, once or twice she perilously escaped disaster. At last, near sunset, she stood before the dwelling-place of the one secure citizen of the Holy City.

A sentry dropped his spear across her path and she had not the countersign to give him. There she and her helpless old attendant stood and looked hopelessly at the refuge denied them.

Presently a man appeared in the colonnade across the front of the house and descending to the sentry line called to him the officer in command. They stood within a few paces of Laodice and she heard the soldier address the man as John, and heard him deliver a report of the day.

When the soldier withdrew to his place, Laodice stepped forward and called to the Gischalan. He stopped, noted that she was beautiful and waited.

"I would speak with the Lady Amaryllis," she hesitated.

"Have you the countersign?" he asked.

"No; else I should have entered. But Amaryllis will know me."

"Enter then," the Gischalan said.

In a moment she was admitted at the solid doors and

led into a vestibule. Here, a porter took charge of Momus and showed him into a side passage, while Laodice followed her conductor through a corridor into an interior hall of splendid simplicity. Lounging on an exedra was a young woman in a woolen chiton, barefoot and trifling with the Greek ampyx that bound her golden hair.

Laodice put up her veil and looked with hurrying heart at her hostess. Before she could get a preliminary idea of the woman she was to meet, John spoke lightly:

"Be wearied no longer. I have brought you a mystery — a stranger, without the countersign, asking audience with you."

"Go back to the fortress," the young woman answered. "Sometime you will find strangers awaiting you there, also without the password. You will lose Jerusalem trifling with me. I have spoken!"

John filliped her ear as he passed through into a corridor which must have led into the Temple precincts. Under the light, Laodice saw that he was a middle-aged Jew, not handsome, but luxuriant with virility. His face showed great ability with no conscience, and force and charm without balance or

morals. Here, then, thought Laodice, is the first of Philadelphus' enemies.

The idler in the exedra, meanwhile, was awaiting the speech of her visitor.

"Art thou she whom I seek?" Laodice asked. "Amaryllis, the Seleucid?"

"I am called by that name."

"I was bidden," Laodice continued, "by one whom we both know, to seek asylum with thee."

"So? Who may that be?"

Laodice whispered the name.

"Philadelphus Maccabaeus."

The Greek's eyes took on a puzzled look. Then she surveyed the girl and as a full conception of the beauty of the young creature before her formed in the Greek's mind, the perplexity left her expression. Her air changed; a subtle smile played about her lips.

"He sent you to me for protection?"

"Until he arrives in Jerusalem," Laodice assented.

"But he is already here."

It was the moment that Laodice had avoided fearfully ever since she had gathered from that winsome stranger by the roadside that his companion was her husband. Although, after that fact had been made

known to her, she had felt that she ought to join Philadelphus and proceed with him to the Holy City, she had endured the exposure of the hills, the want and discomfort of insufficient supplies and the affronts of wayfarers, that she might spare herself as long as possible her union with the unsafe man who had become even more hateful by comparison with the one who had called himself Hesper.

"Perchance thou wilt lead me to him," Laodice said finally.

Amaryllis made no immediate answer. It would have been a natural impulse for her to wish to inquire for the girl's business with the man that the Greek as hostess was expected to conceal. But Amaryllis had her own explanation for this visit. It had been plain to less observant eyes than hers that the newly arrived Philadelphus was not delighted with the bride he had met.

The Greek summoned a servant.

"Go summon thy master, Prisca; and haste. I doubt not I have for him a sweet relief."

The woman bowed.

"If it please thee, madam, the master is without in the vestibule, returning from the city."

Amaryllis signed to the ivory chair before her.

"Sit, lady," she said to Laodice. "He will come at once."

The young woman dropped into the seat and gazed wistfully at her hostess. Instinctively, she knew that in this woman was no relief from the darkened life she was to lead with her husband. The Greek's face, palely lighted by a thoughtful smile, vanished in sudden darkness. Laodice saw instead an image of a strong intent face, brightening under the sunrise, saw it relax, soften, grow inexpressibly kind, then pass, as a tender memory taking leave for ever.

She was brought to herself by the Greek's rising suddenly. The Ephesian appeared at the arch, tossing mantle and kerchief to the porter as he entered. Laodice rose to her feet with difficulty. It was he, indeed!

He was kissing Amaryllis' hand. The Greek was smiling an accusing, conscious smile. She indicated Laodice. The Ephesian's face showed startlement, suspicion and a quick recovery. He bowed low and waited for explanation.

"Then I will go," Amaryllis said with amusement

in her eyes, "if you are acting pretenses for my sake."

She turned toward the arch which led into the interior of the house. The pretender glanced again at Laodice and again at the Greek.

"What is the play, lady?" he asked.

Amaryllis looked at Laodice standing stony white at her place, and lost her confident smile.

"Is this not he?" she asked.

"Is this Philadelphus Maccabaeus?" Laodice asked.

The Ephesian's face changed quickly. Enlightenment mixed with discomfiture appeared there for an instant.

"I am he," he said evenly.

"Then," Laodice said, "I am she whom thou hast expected."

Philadelphus smiled and dropped his head as if in thought.

"One always expects the pleasurable," he essayed, "but at times one does not recognize it when it comes. Who art thou, lady?"

"Pestilence, war and the evil devices of men have

desolated me," she said coldly. "I have only a name. I am Laodice."

"Laodice!" he repeated amiably. "A familiar name; eh, Amaryllis?"

Laodice waited. Philadelphus looked again at her and appeared to wait.

"I am Laodice," the girl repeated, a little disconcerted, "thy wife."

"So!" Philadelphus exclaimed.

There was such well-assumed astonishment in the exclamation that she raised her eyes quickly to his face. There was another expression there; one wholly incredulous.

"Now did I in the profligacy of mine extreme youth marry two Laodices?" he said. "For another Laodice, wife to me, joined me some days since."

Laodice gazed at him without comprehending.

"I say," he repeated, "that my wife Laodice joined me some time ago."

"Why, I — I am Laodice, daughter to Costobarus, and thy wife!" she exclaimed, while her eyes fixed upon him the full force of her astonishment.

He turned to Amaryllis.

"What labyrinth is this, O my friend," he asked, "in which thou hast set my feet?"

"I do not know," Amaryllis laughed suddenly. "Call the princess."

Philadelphus summoned a servant and instructed her to bring his wife. For a short space the three did not speak, though Laodice's lips parted and she stroked her forehead in a bewildered way.

Then Salome, late actress in the theaters at Ephesus, came into the hall. Amaryllis bowed to her and the impostor gave her a chair. He turned to Laodice and with the faintest shadow of a grimace motioned toward the new-comer.

"This," he said, "is Laodice, daughter of Costobarus."

Laodice blazed at the insolent beauty who stared at her with curious eyes.

"That!" she cried. "The daughter of Costobarus!"

The fine brown eyes of the woman smoldered a a little, but she continued to gaze without the least discomposure.

"Who is this, sir?" she asked of Philadelphus.

"That," said Philadelphus evenly, to the actress, "is Laodice, daughter of Costobarus."

"I do not understand," the actress said disgustedly. "You are clumsy, Philadelphus, when you are playful. If this is all, I shall return to my chamber."

She rose, but Laodice sprang into her path.

"Hold!" she cried. "Philadelphus, hast thou accepted this woman without proofs?"

Philadelphus smiled and shook his head.

"And by the by," he asked, "what proof have you?"

Up to that moment Laodice had burned with confident rage, feeling that, by force of the justice of her cause, she might overthrow this preposterous villainy, but at Philadelphus' question she suddenly chilled and blanched and shrank back. A new and supreme disadvantage of her loss presented itself to her at last. She could not prove her identity!

Meanwhile, seeing Laodice falter, the woman's lip curled.

"Weak! Very weak, Philadelphus," she said. "You must invent something better. The success of a jest is all that pardons a jester."

"She robbed me!" Laodice panted impotently.

"Robbed me, after my father had given her refuge!"

"Of what?" the Greek asked.

"My proofs — and two hundred talents!"

"Lady," the actress said to Amaryllis, "my husband's emissary, Aquila, was a pagan. He had with him, on our journey, this woman and her old deformed father who fled when the plague broke out among us. She hoped, I surmise, that we should all die on the way. Even Samson gave up secrets to Delilah, and this Aquila was no better than Samson."

Oriental fury fulminated in the eyes of Laodice. Philadelphus, fearing that she was about to spring at the throat of her traducer, sprang between the two women. In his eyes shone immense admiration at that moment.

There was an instant of critical silence. Then Laodice drew herself up with a sudden accession of strength.

"Madam," she said coldly to Amaryllis, "withhold thy judgment a few days. I shall send my servant back to Ascalon for other proof. *He* can go safely, for he has had the plague."

Philadelphus started; the actress flinched.

"Friend," Philadelphus said in his smooth way, "I

came upon this woman by the wayside in the hills. I and a wayfarer cast a coin for possession of her — and the other man won. Give thyself no concern."

Laodice flung her hands over her face and shrank in an agony of shame down upon the exedra. Amaryllis looked down on her bowed head.

"Is it true?" she asked. After a moment Laodice raised herself.

"God of Israel," she said in a low voice, "how hast Thy servant deserved these things!"

There was a space of silence, in which the two impostors turned together and talking between themselves of anything but the recent interview walked out of the chamber.

After a time Laodice lifted her head and spoke to the Greek.

"If thou wilt give me shelter, madam, for a few days only, I promise thee thou shalt not regret it," she said.

The girl was interesting and Amaryllis had been disappointed in Philadelphus. Nothing tender or compassionate; only a little curiosity, a little rancor, a little ennui and a faint instinctive hope that something of interest might yet develop, moved the Greek.

"Send your servant to Ascalon for proofs," she said. "I shall give you shelter here until you are proved undeserving of it. And since the times are uncertain, do not delay."

CHAPTER X

THE STORY OF A DIVINE TRAGEDY

The following morning, there was a rap at the door of the chamber to which Laodice had been led and informed that it was her own.

She had passed a sleepless night and had risen early, but the knock came late in the morning.

She opened the door.

Without stood a ten year old girl, of the most bewitching beauty, as barely clad as ever the children of her blood went over the green meadows of Achaia. Her golden hair was knotted on the back of her pretty head and held in place by an ampyx. On her feet were tiny sheepskin buskins; about her perfect little body, worn carelessly, was a simple chiton, out of which her dimpled shoulders and small round arms showed pink and tender as field-flowers. Nothing could have been more composed than her gaze at Laodice.

"We breakfast in the hall, now. You are to join us," she said.

Laodice stepped out of the chamber into the court and followed her little guide.

"The mistress and her guests rise late," the child went on. "That perforce starves the rest of us until mid-morning. Eheu! It is the one injustice in this house."

Laodice dumbly wondered if she were to be classed with the house servants while she waited until the return of her devoted old mute.

She was led into a long narrow room, showing the same simple elegance that marked all the house of Amaryllis, the Greek. Down the center were two tables, separated by a cluster of tall plants that almost screened one from the other.

At the first table place was laid for one. At the other, she found by the talk and laughter the rest of the company were gathered. The little girl led Laodice to the single place, seated her, and kissing her hand to her with an almost too-practised bow, fled around the cluster of tall plants. There she heard her childish voice imperiously ordering a servant to attend the mistress' latest guest.

Prisca appeared and silently served Laodice with melon, honey-cakes and milk. Other of the house-servants were visible from time to time. This, then, manifestly was not the breakfast of the menials. She glanced toward the cluster of tall plants. Through an interstice she was able to see all the persons seated at the other table.

There first was the blue-eyed, golden-haired girl. Beside her was a youth, slim, dark, exquisitely fashioned, with limbs and arms as strong as were ever displayed in the games, yet powerful without brutality, graceful without weakness — marks of the ideal athlete that had long since disappeared with the coming of the Roman gladiator. Opposite was a grown man, tall, broad and deep chested, with prominent eyes wide apart and a large mouth. There was a singleness of attitude in him, as in all persons reared to a purpose. It was that certain self-centeredness which is not egotism, yet a subconsciousness of self in all acts. He was the finished product of a specific, life-long training, and the confidence in his atmosphere was the confidence of one aware of his skill and prepared at all times.

Besides these three, there were two women, both in

the garments of the ancient atelier. One was bemarked with clay; the other was stained with paint. Laodice knew at a glance that she looked at a gathering of artists.

"Evidently a gift from John," the little girl was saying. "He can not see that our lady does anything but collect curiosities in this her search after art, and so he must needs add a contribution in this Stygian monster we saw yesterday evening."

Laodice knew that they discussed Momus.

"Perhaps," the athlete said, "he bought this left-handed catapult thinking he might throw the discus farther than I can throw it."

"Well enough," the woman with paint on her tunic put in; "she sent the monster packing. He went out of the gates post-haste last night, they say."

"The pretty stranger that came with him stayed, I observe," the athlete said.

"Pst!" the girl said in a low voice. "Where are the man's eyes in your head, that you do not see her?"

"Looking at you!" the athlete answered.

"Too soon!" the child retorted. "A good six years before I shall know what your looks mean!"

"Is she, this pretty stranger, something of John's taste?" the woman who had blue clay on her garment asked.

"Tut!" the athlete broke in. "John never departed from his ancient barbarism to that extent. That, unless I misjudge my own inclinations in a similar matter, is something this mysterious Philadelphus hath arranged to relieve the tedium of —"

"Tedium!" the girl exclaimed. "By Hector, this Jewish wife of his would open his Ephesian eyes were she to let loose all I suspect in her!"

"Brrr! But you are suspicious!" the athlete shivered. The little girl shaped her lips into a kiss and the athlete leaning across the table snatched it from her before she could avoid him.

The women caught him by the back of his tunic and pulled him down in his chair.

"Sit down!" they whispered. "Don't you see that Juventius is about to speak?"

The athlete glanced at the grown man, who had looked down into his plate at the youth's frolic with the child, with the utmost disdain and boredom in his expression. Now that the silence became noticeable,

he spoke in an affected voice, but one of the deepest music.

"Alas, these Jews!" he said. "How little they know about art! How long has it been since he introduced one of the Temple singers into our lady's hall to show what a piercing high note could be reached by a male voice? And he had the creature sing to prove his contention. I thought I should die! It was worse than awful; it was criminal!"

The athlete laughed.

"Any singer, then, but Juventius therefore is a malefactor!" he said.

"No, it does not follow," Juventius protested in all seriousness, while the child flashed a look of intense amusement at the athlete. "But," waving a pair of long white hands, "none should trifle with music. It is one of the graces of Nature, divine and elemental. Wherefore, anything short of a perfect production becometh a mockery and a mockery against divine things is blasphemy. Ergo, the poor musician is in danger of Hades!"

"The monster is safe, safe!" the girl protested. "He does not sing, and from what I caught through

the crack of the door, the pretty stranger had better not. My lady, the princess, had a merry time with my lord, the prince, at breakfast this morning, all about this same pretty one. So this is why she breakfasts with us — the second table."

Laodice heard this with a sinking heart. This was a strange house in which to live at no definite status, with a future blank and inscrutable.

"Is it, then, that you are wary of offending the over-nice exactions of music, that you do not sing?" the athlete demanded of Juventius.

"Song," replied the singer gravely, "is originally the expression of the highest exaltation. To sing before the high mark of feeling is reached is an insincerity."

"Alas, Juventius," the girl was saying, "how much difficulty you lay up for yourself in determining the limits of art! Teach broadly and the fulfilment of your laws will not be such a task for the overworked and irritable gods of art."

"Child!" Juventius cried passionately. "Your ignorance outreaches your presumption!"

"Fie! Fie!" the athlete put in comfortably. "Let us make a truce, for I announce to you the op-

portunity each to have whatever you wish. We are to have at the proper moment, according to the Jews, a celestial visitation which will enable us to have what we most desire."

"You announce it!" the girl scoffed indignantly. "I have heard of that ever since I was born!"

"I, too, have heard it," said Juventius.

"Well," said the unabashed athlete, "the Pharisee that brings Amaryllis her fruit is so full of it that he gets prophecies mixed with his prices and the patriarchs with his fruit. He says that there are those that declare he is already in the city."

"That he has been seen?" Juventius asked, after a little silence.

"No; merely suspected. They say that things go on in the Temple which seem to show that some resident of their Olympus already inhabits the air."

"I saw Seraiah to-day," one of the women said in a low voice.

"Silent as ever? Spotless as ever? Mysterious as ever?" the athlete asked.

The woman who had spoken shook her head at him as if alarmed.

"I can not bear to hear him ridiculed," she said.

"Somehow it seems blasphemous. They say he marks every one who laughs in his hearing."

"They are not many," the girl said. "For the most part, the citizens of Jerusalem feel as apprehensive about him as you do."

"I wonder that John will stay in the Temple with a god in it," Juventius said, as if he had not heard the rest of the discussion.

"John!" the athelete exclaimed. "John is an adventurer that believes in nothing, has no cause and furthers this warfare for loot and the possible chance of escape when the conflict comes."

"Simon is different," another said. "Now he is wild and mad and insolent and foolhardy, because he believes that, no matter what tangle the situation is in, the celestial emissary he expects will straighten it out for him."

"In short, he means to work such a complexity here that the man who unravels it must needs be divine."

At this moment the door that cut off the rest of the house from this dining-room opened smartly and the supposed Philadelphus stepped in. He closed the door behind him and glanced at the filled table.

Those there seated rose. He spoke to each one by name, and after they had greeted him, they filed out into the court and the servants began to remove the remnants of their meal. Laodice rose at sign of this concerted deference to Philadelphus but sat down again, with her lips compressed. However they had disposed her, she would not accept the menial attitude. She had not finished her honey-cakes.

He came round to her, drew up a chair and sat down beside her. She ignored him, making a feint that was not entirely successful at interest in her fruit.

"Who art thou, in truth?" he asked finally.

"Laodice," she answered coldly.

He sighed and she added nothing more.

"What can your purpose be in this?" he asked.

She ignored the question. After a longer silence, he said in an altered and softened tone:

"What an innocent you are! Certainly this is your first attempt! What marplot told you that such a thing as you have essayed was possible?"

She put aside her plate and her cup, and turned to him.

"By your leave I will retire," she said.

"Not yet," he answered, smiling. "It is my duty as a Jew to help you while there is time."

She settled back in her chair and looked at the cluster of plants while he talked.

"Nothing so damages the beauty of a woman as trickery. No bad woman is beautiful very long. There comes a canker on her soul's beauty, in her face, that disfigures her, soon or late. Whoever you are, whatever your condition, you are lovely yet. Be beautiful; of a surety then you must be good."

It was the same old hypocritical pose that the bad man assumes to cloak himself before innocence. Laodice remembered the incident in the hills.

"Where," she asked coldly, "is he who was with you at Emmaus?"

The pretender started a little, but the increase of alarm on his face showed that he realized next that here was a peril in this woman which he had overlooked.

"Gone," he said unreadily, "gone back to Ephesus."

She did not know what pain this announcement of that winsome stranger's desertion would waken in her heart. Her eyes fell; her brows lifted a little; the

corners of her mouth became pathetic. The pretender, casting a sidelong glance at her, saw to his own safety that she had believed him.

"He was a parasite," he sighed, "living off my bounty. But even that did not invite him when he neared the peril of this city. So he turned back. I — I do not blame him," he added with a little laugh.

"Blame him?" she said quickly. "You — you do not blame him?"

"No! Any place, any condition is more desirable than residence in Jerusalem at this hour."

"If one seeks but to be comfortable. But here is a place for work and for achievement," she declared.

"Too desperate an extreme. Nothing can be done here," he observed, shrugging his shoulders.

She gazed at him with immense contempt.

"That from a son of Judas Maccabaeus!" she exclaimed.

He looked disconcerted.

"Why not?" he urged. "It is neither rational nor practical to attempt the impossible. Jerusalem is doomed. I would but add myself to the sacrifice did I interfere between destruction and its sure prey."

After a silence in which she confronted him with

many emotions showing on her face, she said with infinite pity and disappointment:

"O Philadelphus, you to throw greatness away!"

"Where, O my mysterious genius, are my army, my engines, my subsistence, my advantage and the prize?"

"What was that dowry which was stolen from me to purchase for you but these things? I brought it for this purpose. Another than myself delivered it to you; the end is achieved; what use will you make of it?"

"There is no nation here for that dowry to defend, no crown for it to support. But for this same madness which possesses my lady, the princess, I should depart this day for a safer venture, in some safer country!"

She faced him intently.

"And you will do nothing for Judea?" she asked.

"What can be done?" he asked, throwing out his hands with a careless gesture.

"Oh," she exclaimed with a rush of passionate feeling, "that I were you! You, with the materials for empire-building at your feet! You, with the hour beseeching you, with a people searching for you, with

a treasury filled for you, with ancient prophecy establishing you, ancient precept teaching you, and the cause of God arming you! Philadelphus, son of a great patriot, what are you saying! What can there be done! Oh rather, how dare you not do! What have you about you but the inevitable end of Judah, living contrary to God's plan for it! It is the conscience of Israel rising against its sin and submission! It is the blood of David rebelling against the heathen yoke! It is the hour foretold by Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel and the Twelve, when Israel shall repent and be chastened and return to the heritage of Jacob. Be the repairer of the breach! Be the restorer of the paths to dwell in, my husband! Go out and let Israel behold you! Help them to wipe out the shame of Babylonia and Persia and Macedonia and Rome! Make Jerusalem not only a sanctuary but a capital! Restore the glory of David and the peace of Solomon, for those were God's days and Judah can not prosper except as it returns to them! Philadelphus — "

Laodice halted abruptly in her appeal, breathless with feeling.

The amusement had gone out of his face and his

expression was one of mingled discomfort and surprise at her speech.

"Since you are a thinking woman," he answered, "I must answer you soberly. Even I, expecting disorder and uproar in Jerusalem, when I came from Ephesus, was not prepared for this chaos! Never was such a time! Order is not possible in this extreme. It is unthinkable. Nothing human can save Jerusalem!"

She laid her hand upon him.

"Nothing human!" she repeated quickly. "Seest not that this is the time of the Messiah? Be ready to be helped of God!"

Philadelphus drew away from her uneasily and looked at her from under lowered brows.

"They say," he said in a suppressed voice, as fearing his own words, "that He has come and gone!"

She looked at him blankly. He was glad he had thought of this; it would divert her from a discourse momently growing unpleasant for him. And yet he was afraid of the thing he had said.

"What dost thou say?" she asked.

"He is come and gone — they say."

"Come and gone!"

He nodded irritably. It made him nervous to dwell on the subject.

"Who say?" she demanded.

"Many! Many!" he whispered.

"It is not — do you believe it?" she persisted, with strange terror waiting upon his answer. He moved uneasily but he answered the truth. It was superstition in him that spoke.

"Something in me says it is true," Philadelphus whispered.

She stood transfixed; then all her horror rose in her and cried out against the story.

"It can not be!" she cried. "See the misery and oppression, here, tenfold! Nothing has been done! Nobody heard of Him! He could not fail! What a blasphemy, what a travesty on His Word, to come and fulfil it not and go hence unnoticed! It can not be!"

"But, but —" he protested, somehow terrified by her denial, "only you have not heard. Everywhere are those who believe it and I saw — I saw —"

The growing violence of dissent on her face urged him to speak what his shamed and guilty tongue hesitated to pronounce.

"I saw in Ephesus one who saw Him; I saw in Patmos one who had reclined on His breast!"

"A — a — woman?" she whispered.

"No! No!" he returned in a panic. "A man, a prisoner, old and white and terrible! But it was in his youth! He told me! And the one in Ephesus, a red-beard, hunchbacked and half-blind and even more terrible than the first! He saw Him after He was dead!"

"Dead!" Her lips shaped the word.

"They — yes! He was crucified!"

Her lips parted as if to speak the word, but her mind failed to grasp it certainly. She stood moveless in an actual pain of horror.

"But He rose again from the dead," he persisted, "and left the earth to its own devices hereafter. And so behold Jerusalem!

"And there was one woman," he added, "who had been a scarlet woman. She had anointed His feet with precious oil and wiped them with her hair. And I saw her also — I sought them all out, because they could do miracles and foretell events. Thousands upon thousands believe in them."

"Crucified!" she whispered.

"They say," he went on, "that He pronounced judgment on Jerusalem and that it now cometh to pass!"

The accumulated effect of the calamitous recital was to stun her. She gazed at him with unintelligent eyes, and her lips moved without speaking. For one reared in constant contemplation of God's nearness to His children, acquainted with divine politics, divine literature and divine law, cut off from the world and devoted wholly to religion, the story of a divine tragedy carried with it the full force of its fearful import. Philadelphus' narrative meant to her the crumbling of earth and the effacement of Heaven. She cried wildly her unbelief when words returned to her. But under the fury of her denunciation, unconsciously directed against the conviction that the story was true, she felt her hope of a restored Kingdom of David wavering toward a fall.

While she stood thus, Amaryllis, languid and preoccupied, entered the room with John of Gischala at her side. The Greek noted Philadelphus with a quick accession of interest. John's attention had been instantly arrested by the presence of the other man. Philadelphus turned with fine ease to meet the man

whom he must regard as his enemy and Laodice shrank back in an attempt to get out of sight of the trio.

"Welcome!" said Amaryllis to Philadelphus. "A fortunate visit that makes possible an amnesty for two of my friends at once. This, John, is Philadelphus of Ephesus, a seeker of diversion out of mine own country come to see the end of this great struggle thou wagest against Rome. And thou, Philadelphus, seest before thee, John of Gischala, the arbiter of Judea's future. Be friends."

With a comprehensive sweeping glance John inspected the man before him.

"John of Gischala," he repeated in his feline voice, "the oppressor John. Art thou not afraid of me, sir?"

"Dost thou meditate harm for me, sir?" Philadelphus smiled.

"Art thou, in that case, against me, sir?" John parried.

"On that hingeth his answer," Amaryllis said, glancing at Laodice. "And here is this same pretty stranger who bewitched thee yesterday. Know her as Laodice. Let that be parentage, history, ambition

and religion for her. She, too, seeks diversion in Jerusalem, and is my guest for a while."

The Gischalan took Laodice's hand and held it.

"Welcome, thou," he said. "I will tolerate another man under thy roof if thou wilt but make this pretty bird of passage a permanency," he said to the Greek, after a silent study of Laodice's beauty.

"Let her be a hostage dependent on thy good behavior. Lapse, and I shall send her back to Olympus where they keep such nymphs."

Philadelphus smiled at Laodice, but the shock of their recent talk had shaken her too much to enter into this idle chaff on the lips of those upon whom the fortunes of Israel depended at that very hour.

John looked at her for a long time.

"Amaryllis veils thee in the enchantment of mystery. I think she is tired of me and would have me interested in another woman. She does all things well. Who art thou, in truth?"

The Greek lifted her head and gazed with overt anxiety at the girl; Philadelphus turned toward her uneasily. Here was an opportunity for Laodice either as a disappointed adventuress or as a supplanted wife, to take revenge by exposing this pair

of conspirators pledged to undermine the Gischalan. But the girl had no such thought.

"I am Laodice," she said unreadily. "What history I have belongs to another. What future shall be mine depends on others. I wait."

"If you mean to throw me off, Amaryllis, I shall not miss you," said John.

The Greek smiled and plucking Philadelphus' sleeve led both men away.

"Do not commit yourself," she said to John, "there is yet another woman under this roof. You shall have a choice."

They disappeared in the direction of her hall.

Laodice, stunned, amazed and shaken, stood still. The stock of her troubles amounted to a sum of such magnitude that she could not grasp it clearly. The entire structure which her life training and all her purposes, the hope of her house and her husband's, the future of Judea and the King to come, had constituted, had been attacked and threatened to crumble and be swept away in a few hours' time.

Out of the wreck she rescued one hope. Momus would return from the west with proofs in a few days' time — only a few days!

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE OF OFFENSE

On his way to the oaken door that was for ever double-barred, in that small hall which led to the apartments of Amaryllis' corps of artists, Philadelphus met Salome, the actress. He would have passed her without a word, but the woman, armed with the nettle of a small triumph over the man who held her in contempt, could not forbear piercing him as he passed.

"Hieing away to excite your disappointment further?" she said. "Has the forlorn lady convinced you, yet, that she is indeed your wife?"

"Had I that two hundred talents, I would confess her!" he declared.

"Cruel obstacle! But that two hundred talents is locked away safely, out of your reach. Why do you not run away with this pretty creature?"

Philadelphus glowered at her.

"I have been known to make way with those who stood in my way," he declared.

"I sleep with my door locked," she answered, "and I ever face you. I need never be afraid, therefore."

For a moment he was silent, while she sensed that overweening hate and menace which charged the air about him.

"It is not all as it should be," he said finally. "You are not rid of me. I shall stay."

"You should," she responded comfortably. "You are a show of domesticity which lends color to our claim of wedded state. But you may go or stay. As usual, you are not essential."

"I have been known to be superfluous. However it may be, I get much pleasure in the companionship of this lovely creature, the single flaw in the fine fabric of your villainy. Do not fear her convincing me. She might convince others."

There was no response; after a silence he said as he moved on:

"I shall warn her to feed a morsel of her food to the parrots ere she tastes it, however."

He was gone. The woman felt of the keys that

swung under the folds of her robes. Then she, too, went on.

The oaken door was still fast closed when Philadelphus reached it, but he knew that the girl, who lived within, came out to walk in the sunshine of Amaryllis' court at certain hours while the household was engaged within doors.

He had not long to wait. She came out in a little while, and glanced up and down the hall; but he had heard the turn of the bolt and had stepped into shadow in time. Reassured that no one was near, she emerged and passing down the hall entered the court.

And there presently he joined her.

He sat down on one of the stone seats and smiled at her.

"Do I appear excited?" he asked.

She glanced at him indifferently.

"No," she said.

"I have this day seen destruction resolved for the city."

She took his easy declaration with a frown. If it were true he should not show that flippancy; if it were not he should not have jested.

"I saw," he continued, "Titus and his beloved

Nicanor ride around the walls. Though they were the full length of a bow-shot from me, I knew what they talked about. Now, this young Nicanor is a gad that tickles Titus when his soft heart would urge him into tendernesses toward the enemy. But for Nicanor, Titus would have withdrawn his legions long ago and left Jerusalem to die of its own violences.

"On the day that you came into Jerusalem, Titus, as a display of amicable intentions, rode up to the walls without arms or armor, trusting to the Jews' soldierly honor in refusing to attack an unarmed man. But the Jews have never been instructed in the nice points of military courtesy, so they went out against him by thousands. And but for the fact that he is practised in dodging arrows and his horse is used to running away, Emperor Vespasian would have to leave the ægis to the unlovely Domitian.

"Any Roman but Titus would remember this against the Jews until he had put the last one in bondage, but Titus is not a Roman. I think sometimes that he is a Christian, since it is their boast to love their enemies. Whatever his feelings after that ignominious adventure of a few days ago, forth he

rides this morning; beside him the Gad, Nicanor; behind him, that sweet traitor, Josephus.

"The Darling of Mankind rode so meditatively, so dejectedly, that I knew by his attitude, he said: 'Alack, it galls me to go against this goodly city!'

"By the swagger of the Gad I knew he said: 'Dost gall thee, in truth? Then truly, alack! Withhold thy hand until the city comes out against thee, so thou canst hush thy conscience saying that they began it!'

"Saith the Darling, 'But there be babes and innocent men and women within those walls, who, deserving most of all, shall suffer the greatest!'

"'By Hecate!' quoth the Gad, 'there is not a yearling within that city possessing the power to pucker its lips but would spit upon thee!'

"'It would be sacred innocence!' declares Titus.

"'Or an old man that would not burn thine ears with malediction!'

"'That would be holy dotage!'

"'Or a fine young man but would pale thee on a pike!'

"'Then let some one whom they hate less venom-

ously, beseech them to their own salvation,' implores the Darling.

"Whereupon the Gad beckons insinuatingly to Josephus.

"'Josephus,' says he, 'let us, being more lovable men than Titus, go up unto these walls and give the Jews a chance to be kind.'

"Josephus turns pale, but Nicanor rides upon Jerusalem. And at that what should a miscreant Jew do but string an arrow and plunge it nicely, like a bodkin in a pincushion, in the fat shoulder of the Gad! Alas! It was the ruin of the Holy City! When Titus, pale with concern, reaches his friend kicking on the ground, does the Gad curse the Jews and inveigh against the hardy walls that contain them? Not he! He struggles about so that he may look into the eyes of Titus and commands him to make war on them instantly under pain of the accusation of partiality to them against his friends! And behold, war is declared. I, with mine own eyes, saw siege laid effectively about our unhappy city!"

She gazed at him with alarmed, angry, accusing eyes.

"And yet you do nothing!" she said to him.

He smiled and let his lazy glance slip over her, but he made no response.

"O Philadelphus," she said to him, "how you affront opportunity!"

"There are more captivating things than such opportunity. I have known from the beginning that there was nothing here."

She looked at him with unquiet eyes. Why, then, had he written so confidently to her father, if he had not believed in the hope for Judea?

"From the beginning?" she repeated with inquiry. "You wrote my father from Cæsarea —"

"Your father?" he repeated, smiling with insinuation.

"My father!"

"Who is your father?" he asked.

She turned away from him and walked to the other end of the garden. He had never meant to aspire to the Judean throne! He had simply written so determinedly to Costobarus, that the merchant of Ascalon would have no hesitancy in giving him two hundred talents! In these past days, she had learned enough that was blameworthy in this Philadelphus to make him more than despicable in her eyes. Again, as

hourly since the last interview in the depression in the hills beyond the well, the fine bigness of that lovable companion of his, that had vanished for all time from her life, rose in radiant contrast. She turned back to her husband, with the pallor of longing and homesickness in her face.

"Does this other woman see no fault in this, your idleness?" she demanded.

"She! By the Shades, she sees nothing in me but fault! I would get me up like a sane man and go out of this mad place, but she hath locked up her dowry away from me, which was the simple cause that invited me to join her, and bids me go without her. And I might — but for one other attraction, dearer than the treasure, which also I would take with me."

"Even if she forces you into deeds, I shall forgive her," she declared at last.

He smiled a baffling smile and she looked at him in despair. The very charm of his personal appearance awakened resentment in her; his deft and easy complaisance angered her because it could be effective. She hated the superficial excellence in him which made him a pleasant companion. He had refused to

discuss her identity further, except to prevent her in her own attempts to identify herself. He did not refer to the incidents of their journey to Jerusalem, but she felt that he was conscious of all these things, and her resentment was so great that she put it out of sight, lest at the time when she should be proved she would have come to hate him to the further thwarting of their work for Israel.

"It is sweet to have you concerned for me. Now you may understand how much I am troubled for your own welfare. Do not regard me with that unbending gaze. I am, first and before all else, your friend."

"You have changed," she said slowly. "I did not find in you this solicitude in the hills."

"Unhappiness," he sighed, "makes most men lawless. I should be even now as bad, were I not sure of the sympathy you feel for me."

She looked at him with large disdain.

"Does not this woman treat you well?" she asked with the first glimmer of sarcasm in her eyes.

"Her displeasure in me is that I do not make her a queen; yours, however, that I can not save this doomed nation! Her ambitions are for herself; yours

are for me. Which waketh the response in my heart, lady?"

"What have I lived for?" she burst out. "For what was I brought up and schooled? For what have I sacrificed all the light and desirable things of my youth, but for —"

"Nay! Do not show me, yet, that you are only bent on being queen!" he exclaimed.

"I care for nothing but the rescue of Judea!" she cried passionately. "There is nothing left to me but that!"

"Then your ambitions are still for me. Alas, that the Messiah has come and gone!"

It was his first reference to the great calamity he had told to her a short time before. Its recurrence after she had resolved to regard it as an impossible and blasphemous tale brought a chill to her heart.

"If I can prove to you that there is no hope for Jerusalem, what then?" he asked suddenly.

She flung off the question with a gesture.

"Answer me. What then?"

"It is unimaginable what shall come to pass when God deserts His own."

"No need for imaginings. Look at Jerusalem and

observe the fact. And if we be abandoned, what fealty do we owe to a God that deserts us? If you believe or not you are lost. Let us go out and live."

"If God has deserted us," she said scornfully, "how shall we be happier elsewhere than here?"

"Every god to its own country. The Olympians are a jovial lot. I have seen Joy's very self in heathendom."

She moved away but he rose and followed her.

"Whoever you are," he said in another tone, "your heritage of innocence and earnestness is plain as an open scroll upon your face. Nothing in all the world so appeals to the generosity in the heart of a man as the purity of the woman who is pure. I have said that I am your friend. I do not hold it against you that you doubt that word. Nothing remains but the deed to confirm it. This place is lost — as good as a heap of ashes and splintered rock, this hour! Come away! I'll sacrifice the treasure to protect you!"

"Philadelphus," she said gravely, "we were sent hither to succeed or to suffer the penalty of our failure. My father died that we might have this opportunity. We must use it, or perish with it!"

He shook his head and walked away a step or two.

"You have not the true meaning of life," he said. "Indeed how few of us understand! Obstacles are not an incentive toward attaining impossible things. They are barriers set up by the kindly disposed gods to inform man that he is opposing destiny when he aspires to things he should not have. We were not made to fling ourselves against mighty opposition throughout the little daylight we have; to wound ourselves, to deny ourselves, to alienate that winsome sprite Pleasure, to attain something which was not intended for us by the signs of the obstructions placed in our paths. Who are we that we should achieve mightily! What are we when the gods have done with us, but a handful of dust! Who saves himself from age and unloveliness and ultimate imbecility, by all the superhuman efforts he may exert! A pest on the first morose man that made dismal endeavor a virtue!"

She looked at him with amazement, though until that hour she believed that this man could astonish her no more.

"Misfortune comes often enough without our

knocking at her door," he continued. "Mankind is the only creature with conceit enough to seek to emulate the gods. It is wrong to think that to be moral is to be miserable. Nature's scheme for us, faithfully fulfilled, is always pleasurable. We have only to recognize it, and receive its benefits. Nothing on earth is luckier than man, if he but knew it. A murrain on ambition! Let us be glad!"

How could she be glad with such a man! The time, the call of the hour, the need of her nation, the obligation to her dead father — all these things stood in her way. How had she felt, were this that engaging stranger who had called himself Hooper, urging her to be glad with him! She felt, then and there, the recurrence of guilt which the sight of the reproachful face of Monroe had brought to her when she found herself forgetting her loyalty in the presence of that winsome man. The thought stopped the bitter speech that rose to her lips. She looked away and made no answer. He was close beside her.

"Come away and let this woman who wishes the kingdom have it. She had liefer be rid of me than not."

She gazed at him with a peculiar blankness stealing over her face.

"Oh, for the quintessence of all compounded oaths to charge my vow!" he said.

"For what?" she asked.

"My love, Phryne!"

At the old pagan name with which he had affronted her that morning in the hills, Laodice drew back sharply.

"Dost thou believe in me?" she asked.

"Believe what?"

"That I am thy wife."

"Tut! Back to the old quarrel! No! But by Heaven, thou art my sweetheart!"

She stopped at the edge of an exclamation and looked at him with widening eyes.

"Come, let us get out of this place. I can get the dowry! Let her stay here and be queen over this place if she will. I had rather possess you than all the kingdoms!"

But Laodice flung him off while a flame of anger crimsoned her face.

"Thou to insult me, thy lawful wife!" she brought out between clenched teeth. "Thou to offer

affront to thine own marriage! I to live in shame with mine own husband!"

The insult in his speech overwhelmed her and after a moment's lingering for words to express her rage, she turned and fled back to her room and barred her door upon him.

After sunset the lights leaped up in the hall of Amaryllis the Greek. Presently there came a knock at Laodice's door. The girl, fearing that Philadelphus stood without, sat still and made no answer. A moment later the visitor spoke. It was the little girl who acted as page for the Greek.

"Open, lady; it is I, Myrrha."

Laodice went to the windows.

"Amaryllis sends thee greeting and would speak with thee, in her hall," the girl said.

Reluctantly Laodice, who feared the revelation which the light might have to make of her stunned and revolted face, followed the page.

The Greek was standing, as if in evidence that the interview would not be long. She noted the intense change on the face of her young guest and watched her narrowly for any new light which her disclosure would bring.

"I have sent for thee," the Greek began smoothly, "to tell thee somewhat that I should perhaps withhold, that thou shouldst sleep well, this night. But it is a perplexity perhaps thou wouldst face at once."

Laodice bowed her head.

"It is this: Titus and his friend, Nicanor, approached too close the walls this day, and Nicanor was wounded by an arrow. In retaliation, perfect siege hath been laid about the walls. None may come into the city."

"And — Momus, my servant," Laodice cried, waking for the first time to the calamity in this blockade, "he can not come back to me?"

"No. If he attempts it, he will be captured and put to death."

Laodice clasped her hands, while drop by drop the color left her face.

"In God's name," she whispered, "what will become of me?"

Amaryllis made no answer.

"Can — can I not go out?" Laodice asked presently, depending entirely on the Greek as adviser.

"You can — but to what fortune? Perhaps —" She stopped a moment. "No," she continued, "you

have never been in a camp. No; you can not go out."

"What, then, am I to do?" Laodice cried with increasing alarm.

Amaryllis shrugged her shoulders.

"I can advise with John," she said. "Doubtless he will allow you to remain here until you can provide yourself with other shelter."

Laodice heard this cold sentence with a chill of fear that was new to her. Faint pictures of hunger and violence, terrifying in the extreme, confronted her. Yet not any of them frightened her more than the offered favor of the Gischalan. Her indignation at the woman who had supplanted her swept over her with a reflexive flush of heat.

"God of my fathers, judge her in her lies, and pour the fire of Thy wrath upon her!" she exclaimed vehemently.

Amaryllis gazed curiously at the girl. In her soul, she asked herself if there might not be unsounded depths of fierceness in this nature which she ought not to stir up.

"Thou hast hope," she said tactfully. "She hath no such beauty as thine!"

"Nothing but my proofs!" Laodice broke in.

"And Philadelphus is a young man."

"Rejecting her only because I am fairer than she! He is no just man!" Laodice cried hotly.

"Softly, child," the Greek said, smiling; "thou hast said that he is thy husband."

Laodice turned away, her brain whirling with anger, fear and shame.

"Well?" said the Greek coolly, after a silence.

"Where shall I go?" Laodice asked.

"Thou hast been too tenderly nurtured to go into the streets. I shall ask John to shelter thee until thou canst care for thyself."

Laodice looked at her without understanding.

"Thou canst not stay here for long because the wife to Philadelphus is in a way a power in my house and she will not suffer it. But never fear; Jerusalem is not yet so far gone that it would not enjoy a pretty stranger."

The curious sense of indignation that possessed Laodice was purely instinctive. Her mind could not sense the actual insult in the Greek's words.

"I would advise you to be kind to Philadelphus."

"But, but —" Laodice cried, struggling with tears and shame, "he has this day offered insult to

his own marriage with me, by asking that I live in shame with him till it could be proved that I am his wife!"

The Greek's smile did not change.

"If we weigh all the unpleasantness of wedded life in too delicate a balance, my friend, I fear there would be little, indeed, that would escape condemnation as humiliating."

Laodice raised her scarlet face to look in wonder at the Greek. The cold smiling lips dismayed her for a moment.

"And thou seest no shame in this?" she faltered.

"Thou sayest he is thy husband; why resent it?"

"Dost thou not see — see that — what am I but a shameless woman, if I live with him, though I be married to him thrice over!"

"After all," said the Greek, after a silence which said more than words, "it is the consciousness of your own integrity which must influence you; not what others think of you. It is not as if your husband thought better of you than you really are."

"And you believe that I —" Laodice began and stopped, bewildered.

Amaryllis, smiling, moved toward the inner corri-

dor of her house. At the threshold of the arch she called back:

"Please yourself, my friend," and was gone.

Laodice was, by this time, stunned and intensely repelled. The hand on which Amaryllis had laid hers in passing tingled under the touch. Unconsciously she shook off the sensation of contact. The whole clear white interior of the hall became instantly unclean. Her standards of right and wrong were shaken; the wholesale assaults on her ideals left her shocked and unconfident. She felt the panic that all innocent women feel when suddenly aroused to the unfitness of their surroundings.

When she turned to hurry to her room, a flood of scarlet rushed into her cheeks and she shrank back, shaken with surprise and delight.

Before her stood a man, pale and thin, with his eyes upon her.

CHAPTER XII

THE PRINCE RETURNS

Joseph, the shepherd, son of Thomas of Pella, moved out of the green marsh before sunset, as he had planned to do, but not for the original motive. The sheep, indeed, would not have flourished in that dampness, rich as it was in young grass, but, more than that, there was no shelter for the wounded man who lay by the roadside.

The shepherd, who knew the hills of Judea as far as the Plain of Esdraelon as well as he knew the stony streets of the Christian city, located the nearest roof as one which a fagot-maker had occupied two years before. It was some distance up in the hills to the west. Since the scourge of war had passed over Palestine, there were scores of such hovels, vacant and abandoned to the bats and the small wild life about the countryside, and the boy doubted seriously if the thatch that covered it were still whole. But he attracted the attention of a pair of robust young

Galileans on the way to the Passover, and, by their help, carried the wounded man to shelter in this hut. Urge, the sheep-dog, rushed the sheep out of the sedge and hurried them after his master, and in an hour Joseph was once more settled, his sheep were once more nosing over the rocky slants of a hill, his dog once more flat on his belly, watching. But it was a different day, after all.

The hut of the fagot-maker was the four walls and a roof and the earth that floored it, but it was wealth because it was shelter. It had two doors which were merely openings in the sides and between them lay the man on sheep-pelts with a cotton abas, which one of the Galileans had left, over him. At one of these doors, sitting sidewise, so that he could watch in or out, sat Joseph.

All night the man on the sheepskins spoke to the blackened thatch above him of the siege of Jerusalem and the treachery of Julian of Ephesus. He read letters from Costobarus and instructed Aquila over and over again. Then he tossed a coin and spent hours counting the hairs in the long locks that fell from the shining head of the moon down upon his breast, at midnight.

At times the boy, with the exquisite beauty of sleep on his heavy lids, would creep over from his vigil at the door and lay his cool hand on the sick man's forehead. And the sick man would speak in a low controlled voice, saying:

"Naaman being a leper, my friend, why was not the law fulfilled against him?"

But the soothing influence of that touch did not endure. Again, he took census of the fighting-men of Judea, by the Roman statistics which he had from the decurion, and searched through his tunic for his wallet to write down the result. Failing to find it, he raised himself to shout for Julian to return his property.

Again the cool hands would stroke the fevered forehead and the sick man would say:

"Good my Lord, they fetched snow from the mountains to cool this wine."

But how white the hands of that fair girl in the hills! Why, these hands beside hers were as satyrs' hooves to anemones! Her lashes were so long, and he knew that her lips were as cool as the heart of a melon; but that husband of hers knew better than he!

And he, grandson of the just Maccabee, allied by marriage to the noble line of Costobarus through his daughter, Laodice, the bride with the greatest dowry in Judea, had staked his soul on the toss of a coin and had lost it!

At this the shepherd boy straightened himself and gave attention.

But he was wholly lost, the sick man would go on, rolling his head from side to side; he could not join Laodice because he had loved a woman of the wayside and could not cast out that love; he was not a Jew because he had rather linger with this strange beauty in the hills than hasten on the rescue of Jerusalem; he had not apostatized, though he was as wholly lost as if he had done so; he hated the heathen and would not be one of them. He would abide in the wilderness and perish, if this young spirit that abode by his side, with a face like Michael's and a form so like the shepherd David's, would only suffer the darkness to come at him.

"Unless I mistake," the little shepherd said at such times, "there is more than a wound troubling this head."

Thus day in and day out the shepherd watched by

the sick man who had no medicine but the recuperative powers of his strong young body. So there came a night when the boy, rousing from a doze into which he had dropped, saw the sick man stretched upon his pallet motionless as he had not been for days. The shepherd felt the forehead and the wrists and sank again into slumber. At dawn he rose from the earth which had been his bed throughout this time and went forth to attend his flocks, and when he was gone, the sick man opened his eyes.

He looked up at the blackened rafters; he looked out at either door and frowned perplexed, first at the hills, then at the valley. He raised his head and dropped it suddenly with great amazement and much weariness. Finally he ventured to lift a wilted and fragile hand and looked at it. It was not white; but it was unsteady as a laurel leaf beside a waterfall. After a moment's rest from the exertion he parted his lips to speak, but a whisper faint as the sound of the air in the shrubs issued from them. He listened but there was no answer. There was the activity of birds and insects, moving leaves and bleating sheep without, but it was all blithely indifferent to him. Finally he extended his arms and pressing

them on his pallet tried to rise, but he could have lifted the earth as easily. Falling back and dazed with weakness, he lay still and slept again.

When he awoke rested sufficiently to think, he recalled that he had been twice stabbed by Julian of Ephesus by the marsh on the road to Jerusalem. He had probably been carried to this place and nursed back to life by the householder.

Then he remembered. In his search after cause for his cousin's attack upon him, he readily fixed upon Julian's rage at the Maccabee's preëmption of the beautiful girl in the hills. Instantly, the disgrace of violence committed in a quarrel between himself and his cousin over the possession of a woman, appealed to him. And even as instantly, his defiant heart accepted its shame and persisted in its fault. It is an extreme of love, indeed, if no circumstance however impelling raises a regret in the heart of a man; for he flung off with a weak gesture any chiding of conscience against cherishing his dream, and abandoned himself wholly to his yearning for the girl in the tissue of moonbeams.

There was a quiet step on the earth at the threshold. Joseph, the shepherd, stood there. The two

looked at each other; one with inquiry and weakness in his face; the other with good-will and reassurance.

"Boy," said the Maccabee feebly, "I have been sick."

"Friend, I am witness to that. I am your nurse," the boy replied.

After a little silence the Maccabee extended his hand. The boy took it with a sudden flush of emotion, but feeling its weakness, refrained from pressing it too hard, and laid it back with great care on his patient's breast. The Maccabee looked out at the door, away from the full eyes of his young host.

He was touched presently, and a cup of milk was silently put to his lips. He drank and turning himself with effort fell asleep.

When he awoke again, after many hours, it was night. In the door with his head dropped back between his shoulders gazing up at the sky overhead, sat the boy.

"Where," the Maccabee began, "are the rest of you?"

The boy turned around quickly, and answered with all seriousness.

"I am all here."

"Did you," the Maccabee began again, after silence, "care for me alone?"

"There has been no one here but us," the boy said, hesitating at the symptoms of gratitude in the Maccabee's voice.

"Us?"

"You and me."

After another silence, the Maccabee laughed weakly.

"It requires two to constitute 'us' and I am, by all signs, not a whole one!"

"But you will be in a few days," the boy declared admiringly. "You are an excellent sick man."

The Maccabee looked at him meditatively.

"I am merely perverse," he said darkly; "I knew it would be so much pleasure to my murderer to know that I died, duly."

The shepherd repressed his curiosity, as the best thing for his patient's welfare, and suggested another subject rather disjointedly.

"I have been thinking," he said, "about Jerusalem. I was there once upon a time."

"Once!" the Maccabee said. "You are old enough to attend the Passover."

"But our people do not attend the feast. We are Christians."

The Maccabee moved so that he could look at the boy. He might have known it, he exclaimed to himself. It was just such an extreme act of mercy, this assuming the care of a stranger in a wilderness, as he had ever known Christians to do in that city of irrational faiths, Ephesus.

"Well?" he said, hoping the boy would go on and spare him an expression on that announcement.

"I can not forget Jerusalem."

"No one forgets Jerusalem — except one that falls in love by the wayside," the man said.

Again the boy detected a ring of unexplained melancholy in his patient's voice, and talked on as a preventive.

"Urban, the pastor, took me there. It was in the days of mine instruction for baptism. He went to Jerusalem to trial, but there was disorder in the city about the procurator, who was driven out that day, and Urban was not called. But he remained, lest he

be accused of fleeing, and then it was he took me over the walks of Jesus."

"Jesus — that is the name," the Maccabee said to himself. "They are born, given in marriage, fall or flourish, live and die in that name. Likewise they pick up a wounded stranger and care for him in that name. They are a strange people, a strange people!"

"They would not let us into the Temple," Joseph went on, "because I am an Arab, born a Christian. So I could not see where Jesus was presented, in infancy. But we went to the synagogues where He taught; we went out upon Olivet to Gethsemane where He suffered in the Garden; we climbed that hill to the south from which He looked upon the City and wept over it, and prophesied this hour. Then we sought the ravine where Judas betrayed Him with a kiss, and afterward Urban led me over the streets by which He was taken first to Annas and to Caiaphas and thence to Pilate and to Herod. After that, by the Way of the Cross to Golgotha; from there to His Tomb. And when we had seen the Guest-chamber and stood upon the Place of the Ascension, I needed no further instruction."

The boy had forgotten his guest. By the rapt light in his eyes, the Maccabee knew that the boy was once more journeying over the stones of the streets of the Holy City, or standing awed on the polished pavements of its lordly interiors, or on the topmost point of her hills with the broad-winged wind from the east flying his long locks.

"*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy,*" the Maccabee said, half to himself.

The boy heard him, but his patient's words merged with the dream that held him entranced. The Maccabee went on.

"So said the Psalmist to himself," he said. "What had he to do for Jerusalem; what did he fear would win him away from that labor for Jerusalem, that he took that vow? It was easy enough to revile Babylon, the oppressor, that stood between him and Jerusalem; but what if he had been the captive of beauty, and chained by the bonds of lovely hair!"

The boy turned now and looked at the Maccabee. The eyes of the two met fair. Then the Maccabee

unburdened his soul and told of the girl to this child, who was a Christian and a humble shepherd in the starved hills of Judea.

"I met her," the boy said after a long silence. "And by what I learned of her spirit that night, she will not be happy to know that you have stepped aside for her sake."

"You met her, also; and you loved her, too?"

The boy assented gravely. The Maccabee slowly lifted his eyes from the young shepherd's face, till they rested on the slope of sky filled with stars visible through the open door.

"And she would have me go on to this city, to the one who awaits me there and whom I shall not be glad to see; take up the labor that will be robbed of its chief joy in its success and live the long, long days of life without her?"

The boy made no answer to this; he knew that this white-faced man was wrestling with himself and comment from him was not expected. By the light of the failing fire without, he saw that face sober, take on shadow and grow immeasurably sad. The minutes passed and he knew that the Maccabee would not speak again.

Thereafter followed three days of silence, except the essential communication or the mutterings of the Maccabee against his weakness and unsteadiness. On the fourth day the Maccabee declared that he was able to travel. Joseph protested, but not for long. He had learned in the sojourn of his guest that this man was in the habit of doing as he pleased. So the shepherd sighed and let him go reluctantly.

"But," he insisted to the last moment, "remember that Pella is a City of Refuge. If Jerusalem ceases to be hospitable, come to Pella."

A thought struck him.

"She," he said in a low tone, "promised that she would come."

"Then expect me," the Maccabee said.

The shepherd boy smiled contentedly and blessed the Maccabee and let him go. As long as the man could see, his young host watched him, and at the summit of the hill the Maccabee turned to wave his final farewell. When the path dipped down the other side of the hill, the man felt that more than the sunshine had been cut off by its great shadow.

He did not go forward with a light heart. The whole of his purpose had suddenly resolved itself

into duty. There had been a certain nervous expectancy that was almost fear in the thought of meeting the grown woman he had married in her babyhood. He had lived in Ephesus with an unengaged heart in all the crowd of opportunities for love, good and bad. He had magnetism, strength, aloofness and a certain beauty — four qualifications which had made him over and over again immensely attractive to all classes of Ephesian women. But whatever his response to them, he had not loved. Love and marriage were things so apart from his activities as to be uninteresting. When finally he was called in full manhood to assume without preliminary both of these things, he was uncomfortable and apprehensive. But after he had met the girl in the hills, his sensations of reluctance became emphatic, became an actual dread, so that he thrust away all thought of the domestic side of the life that confronted him, and bitterly resigned all hope in the tender things that were the portion of all men. The villainy of Julian of Ephesus engaged him chiefly, and his punishment. After that, then the establishment of his kingdom, politics, conquest and power — but not love!

Late that afternoon, he stepped out of a wady west of Jerusalem and halted.

Ahead of him ran a road depressed between worn, hard, bare banks of earth, past a deserted pool, marged with stone, up shining surfaces of outcropping rock, through avenues of clustered tombs, pillars, pagan monuments which were tracks of the Herods, dead and abandoned, splendid pleasure gardens, suburban palaces lifeless and still, toward the looming Tower of Hippicus, brooding over a fast-closed gate.

The Maccabee nodded. It was as he had expected. The city was besieged.

It was afternoon, a week-day at the busiest portal of Jerusalem; but save for the fixed and pygmy sentry upon the tower, there was no living thing to be seen, no single sound to be heard.

Beyond the mounting hills of the City of David stood up, shouldering like mantles of snow their burden of sun-whitened houses. Above it all, supreme over the blackened masonry of Roman Antonia, stood a glittering vision in marble and gold — the Temple. At a distance it could not be seen that any of those inwalled splendors lacked; Jerusalem appeared

intact, but the multitudes at the gate were absent and the voice of the city was stilled.

For one expecting to find Jerusalem animated and beholding it still and lifeless, how quickly its white walls, its white houses and its sparkling Temple became haunted, dead crypts and sepulchers.

But presently there came across the considerable distance that lay between him and Jerusalem, a sound remarkably distinct because of the utter stillness that prevailed. It was the jingle of harness and the ring of hoof-beats upon stones embedded in the gray earth.

A Roman in armor polished like gold, with a floating mantle significantly bordered in purple, rode slowly into the open space, drew up his horse and stopped. The Maccabee looked at him sharply, then quitted his shelter and walked down toward the rider. At sight of him, the horseman clapped his hand to his short sword, but the Maccabee put up his empty hands and smiled at the man of all superior advantage. Then the light of recognition broke over the Roman's face.

"You!" he cried.

"I, Cæsar," the Maccabee responded. For a moment there was silence in which the Jew watched the

flickering of amazement and perplexity on Titus' face.

"What do you here, away from Ephesus, and worse, attempting to run my lines?" he demanded finally.

The Maccabee signed toward the walls.

"My wife is there," he said briefly.

The Roman made an exclamation which showed the sudden change to enlightenment.

"Solicitous after these many years?" he demanded.

"She has two hundred talents," the Maccabee replied.

Titus smiled and shook his head.

"I ought to keep her there. Rome must get treasure enough out of that rebellious city to repay her for her pains in subjugating it."

"Pay yourself out of another pocket than mine. It will take two hundred talents to repay me for all that I have suffered to get it. I want the countersign, Titus. You owe me it."

"Will you come out of there, at once?" the Roman demanded. "Not that I suspect you will make the city harder to take, but I should dislike to make war on an old comrade in my Ephesian revels."

The Maccabee looked doubtful.

"I can not promise," he said. "At least do not hold off the siege until you see me again without the walls. It might lose you prestige in Rome."

Titus swung his bridle while he gazed at the Maccabee.

"I wish Nicanor were here," he said finally. "He might be able to see harm in you; but I never could. You will have to promise me something — anything so it is a promise — before I can let you in. Something to appease Nicanor, else I shall never hear the last of this."

The Maccabee laughed, the sudden harsh laugh of one impelled to amusement unexpectedly.

"Assure Nicanor, for me, that I shall come out of Jerusalem one day. Dead or alive, I shall do it! You need not add that I did not specify the date of my exodus. What is the word?"

"Berenice. And Jove help you! Farewell."

Titus rode on.

A little later, after a parley with the Roman sentries and again with the sentries at the Gate of Hippicus, the Maccabee was admitted to the Holy City.

About him as he passed through the gates were

the soldiers of Simon. They were not such men as he expected to see defending the City of David. There was an extravagant, half-pastoral manner about them, a pose of which they should not have been conscious at this hour of peril for the nation and the hierarchy. He looked at their incomplete, meaningless uniform, at their arms, half savage, at their faces, half mad, and believed that he, with an army rationally organized and effectually equipped, would have little difficulty in subduing the unbalanced forces of Simon.

Since siege was laid, he did not expect to be met by Amaryllis' servant in the purple turban. He approached a citizen.

"I seek Amaryllis, the Seleucid," he said.

The eye of the Jew traveled over him, with some disapproval.

"The mistress of the Gischalan?" was the returned inquiry. The Maccabee assented calmly. The young man indicated a broad street moving with people which led with tolerable directness toward the base of Moriah.

"Hence to the Tyropean Bridge at the end of this street; thence down beside the bridge into Gihon.

Cross to the wall supporting Moriah and builded against it thou wilt find a new house, of the fashion of the Greeks. If thou canst pass her sentries, thou wilt find her within."

The Maccabee thanked his informant and turned through the Passover hosts to follow the directions.

To a visitor recently familiar with the city, Jerusalem would have been strange; he would have been lost in its ruined and disordered streets. But this man came with only the four corners of the compass to direct him and the Temple as a landmark to guide him. Therefore though he entered upon territory which he had not traversed since childhood he went forward confidently.

It was not simple; it was not readily done; but the darkness found him at his destination.

When he was within a rod of the house, he was halted by a Jewish soldier. He whispered to the man the word which Amaryllis had sent to him, and the soldier stepped aside and let him pass.

In another moment he was admitted to the house of Amaryllis.

A wick coated with aromatic wax burned in the brass bowl on a tripod and cast a crystal clear light

down upon the exedra and the delicate lectern with its rolls of parchment and brass cylinders from which they had been withdrawn. Opposite, with her arms close down to her sides, her hands clenched, her shoulders drawn up, stood the girl he had played for and won in the hills of Judea!

CHAPTER XIII

A NEW PRETENDER

A sudden wave of delight, a sudden rush of blood through his veins, swept before it and away for that time all memory of his struggle and his resolution to renounce her. All that was left was the irresistible storm of impulse upon his reserve and his self-control.

When she recognized him, she started violently, smote her hands together and gazed at him with such overweening joy written on her face, that he would have swept her into his arms, but for her quick recovery and retreat. In shelter behind the exedra she halted, fended from him by the marble seat. He gazed across its back at her with all the love of his determined soul shining in his eyes.

"You! You!" she cried.

"But you!" he cried back at her across the exedra.

The preposterousness of their greetings appealed to them at that moment and they both laughed. He started around the exedra; she moved away.

"Stay!" he begged. "I want only to touch — your hand."

Shyly, she let him take both of her hands, and he lifted them in spite of her little show of resistance and kissed them.

"We might have saved ourselves farewells and journeyed together," he said blithely.

"But I thought you had gone back to Ephesus," she said.

"What! After you had told me you were going to Jerusalem? No. I have been nursing a knife wound in a sheep hovel in the hills since an hour after I saw you last."

Her lips parted and her face grew grave, deeply compassionate and grieved. If there remained any weakness in his frame before that moment, the spell of her pity enchanted him to strength again. He found himself searching for words to describe his pain, that he might elicit more of that curative sweet.

"I was very near to death," he added seriously.

"What — what happened?" she asked, noting the

pallor on his face under the suffusion which his pleasure had made there.

"There was one more in the party than was needed; so my amiable companion reduced the number by stabbing me in the back," he explained.

There was instant silence. Slowly she drew away from him. Entire pallor covered her face and in her eyes grew a horror.

"Did — do you say that Philadelphus stabbed — you — in the back?" she asked, speaking slowly.

"Phila —" he stopped on the brink of a puzzled inquiry, and for a space they regarded each other, each turning over his own perplexity for himself.

"Ask me that again," he commanded her suddenly. "I did not understand."

She hesitated and closed her lips. Her husband had stabbed this man in the back! Because of her? No! Philadelphus had refused to believe her. Why then should he have committed such a deed?

"So you are not ready to believe it of this — Philadelphus?" he asked, venturing his question on an immense surmise that was forcing itself upon him.

She looked at him with beseeching eyes. How was she to regard herself in this matter? A partizan of

the man she hated, or a sympathizer with this stranger who had already given her too much joy? Was she never to know any good of this man to whom she was wedded? For a moment losing sight of her concern for Judea and her resolution that her father should not have died in vain, she was rejoiced that another woman had taken her place by his side. The quasi liberty made her interest in this stranger at least not entirely sinful.

"Who are you?" he demanded finally.

How, then, could she tell him that she was the wife of the man who had treacherously attempted his life? How, also, since she was denied by every one in that house, expect him to believe her? The bitterness of her recent interview with Amaryllis rose to the surface again.

"I am nothing; I have no name; I am nobody!" she cried.

He was startled.

"What is this? Are you not welcome in this house?" he demanded.

"Yes — and no! Amaryllis is good — but —"

"But what?"

She shook her head.

"Surely, thou canst speak without fear to me," he said gently.

"There is — only Amaryllis is kind," she essayed finally.

He laid his hand on her wrist.

"Is it — the woman from Ascalon?" he asked, his suspicion lighting instantly upon the wife whom he had expected to meet.

She flung up her head and gazed at him with startled eyes. He believed that he had touched upon the fact.

"So!" he exclaimed.

"She has deceived Philadelphus —" she whispered defensively, but he broke in sharply.

"Whom hath she deceived?"

She closed her lips and looked at him perplexed. Certainly this was the companion of Philadelphus, who had told her freely half of her husband's ambitions, long before he had come to Jerusalem. She could not have betrayed her husband in thus mentioning his name.

"Your companion of the journey hither — whom you even now accused — Philadelphus Maccabaeus."

There was a dead pause in which his fingers still

held her wrist and his deep eyes were fixed on her face. He was recalling by immense mental bounds all the evidence that would tend to confirm the suspicion in his brain. He had told her his own story but had invested it in Julian of Ephesus. His wallet, with all its proofs, was gone; the Ephesian had examined him carefully to know if any one in Jerusalem would recognize him; and lastly, without cause, Julian had stabbed him in the back. Could it be possible that Julian of Ephesus, believing that he had made way with the Maccabee, had come to Jerusalem, masquerading under his name?

While he stood thus gazing, hardly seeing the face that looked up at him with such troubled wonder, he saw her turn her eyes quickly, shrink; and then wrenching her hands from his, she fled.

He looked up. Two women were standing before him.

"I seek Amaryllis, the Seleucid," he said, recovering himself.

"I am she," the Greek said, stepping forward.

"Thou entertainest Laodice, daughter of Costobarus of Ascalon?" he added.

The Greek bowed.

"I would see her," he said bluntly.

Amaryllis signed to the woman at her side.

"This is she," she said simply.

The Maccabee looked quickly at the woman. After his close communication with the beautiful girl for whom his heart warmed as it had never done before, he was instantly aware of an immense contrast between her and the woman who had been introduced to him at that moment. They were both Jewesses; both were beautiful, each in her own way; both appeared intelligent and winsome. But he loved the girl, and this woman stood in the way of that love. Therefore her charms were nullified; her latent faults intensified; all in all she repelled him because she was an obstacle.

The injustice in his feelings toward her did not occur to him. He was angry because she had come; he hated her for her stateliness; he found himself looking for defects in her and belittling her undeniable graces. Confused and for the moment without plan, he looked at her frowning, and with cold astonishment the woman gazed back at him.

"Thou art Laodice, daughter of Costobarus?" he asked, to gain time.

She inclined her head.

"When — when dost thou expect Philadelphus?" he asked next.

"Why do you ask?" she parried.

"I — I have a message for him," he essayed finally. "Is he here?"

"Tell me, who art thou?" the woman asked pointedly.

A vision of the girl, flushed and trembling with pleasure at sight of him, flashed with poignant effect upon him at that moment. The warmth and softness of her hands under the pressure of his happy lips was still with him. It would be infidelity to his own feelings to renounce her then. It was becoming a physical impossibility for him to accept this other woman.

He hesitated and reddened. An old subterfuge occurred to him at a desperate minute.

"I — I am Hesper — of Ephesus," he essayed.

"What is thy business with Philadelphus?" the woman persisted.

Again the Maccabee floundered. It had been easy to invent a story to keep the woman he loved from discovering that he was a married man, but the point

in question was different. Now, filled with dismay and indignation, apprehension and reluctance, his fertile mind failed him at the moment of its greatest need.

And the eyes of the Greek, filling with suspicion and intense interest, rested upon him.

"I asked," the actress repeated calmly, "thy business with Philadelphus."

At that instant a tremendous shock shook the house to its foundations; the hanging lamps lurched; the exedra jarred and in an instant several of the servants appeared at various openings into passages. Before any of the group could stir, a second thunderous shock sent a tremor over the room, and a fragment of marble detached from a support overhead and dropped to the pavement.

"It is an attack!" Amaryllis cried.

"On this house?" Salome demanded.

There was a clatter of arms and several men in Jewish armor rushed through the chamber from the passage that led in from the Temple.

"I shall see," said the Maccabee, and followed the men at once.

Without he saw the night sky overhead crossed by

dark stones flying over the wall to the east. Warfare had begun.

But the attack was simply preliminary and desultory. It ceased while he waited. Presently it began farther toward the north. The catapult had been moved. The Maccabee hesitated in the colonnade.

The beautiful girl in the house of Amaryllis was in no further danger. The interruption had saved him at a critical moment.

He walked down the steps and out into the night.

"Liberty!" he whispered with a sigh of relief. "Now what to do?"

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRIDE OF AMARYLLIS

The night following the wounding of Nicanor, John spent on his fortifications expecting an attack. It was one of the few nights when the Gischalan kept vigil, for he refused to contribute fatigue to the prospering of his cause.

Sometime in mid-morning he appeared in the house of Amaryllis and sent a servant to her asking her to breakfast with him. The Greek sent him in return a wax tablet on which she had written that she was shut up in her chamber writing verse, but that she had provided him a companion as entertaining as she.

When he passed into the Greek's dining-room, the woman who called herself wife to Philadelphus awaited him at the table.

When he sat she dropped into a chair beside him

and laid before him a bunch of grapes from Crete, preserved throughout the winter in casks filled with ground cork.

"It is the last, Amaryllis says," she observed. "And siege is laid."

John looked ruefully at the fruit.

"Perhaps," he said after thought, "were I a thrifty man and a spiteful one, I would not eat them. Instead, I should have the same cluster served me every morning that I might say to mine enemies, with truth, that I have Cretan grapes for breakfast daily. They will keep," he added presently, "for it is tradition that stores laid up for siege never decay."

"Obviously," said the woman, "they do not last long enough."

John plucked off one of the light green grapes and ate it with relish.

"Since thou doubtest the tradition, I shall not have these spoil."

"But you destroy even a better boast over your enemy. Then you could say to him, 'We can not consume all our food. Behold the grapes rot in the lofts!'"

John smiled.

"Half of the lies go to preserve another's opinion of us. How much we respect our fellows!"

"Be comforted; there are as many lying for our sakes! But how goes it without on the walls?"

"Against Rome or against Simon?"

"Both."

"Ill enough. But when Titus presses too close Simon will lay down his hostility toward me; and when Titus becomes too effective, we are to have a divine interference, so our prophets say."

"I observe," the woman said, "we Jews at this time are relying much on the prophets to fight our battles. Behold, our stores will hold out, we say, because it is said; and we shall fight indifferently, because Daniel hath bespoken a Deliverer for us at this time!"

John, with his wine-glass between thumb and finger, looked at her.

"I should expect a heretic to be so critical for us," he said.

The woman sat with her elbows on the table, her chin in her hands, gazing moodily at the sunlight falling through the brass grill over the windows on the court.

She ignored his remark, but answered presently in another tone.

"There is nothing to employ a surfeited mind in this city."

"No?" he said lightly, while interest began to awaken in his eyes. "The making of enjoyment is here. I have found it so."

"Perchance you have," but she halted and resumed her moody gaze at the flood of sunlight.

"Are you weary?" he asked. "What is it?"

"Idleness! Eating, sleeping — no; not even that; for idleness steals away my appetite and my repose."

"Strange restiveness for one reared in the quiet inner chambers of a Jewish house," he observed.

Her eyes dropped away to the floor; he saw that she was breathing quickly.

"I dreamed of a free life once," she said in a restrained way. "I have not since been satisfied. I dreamed of cities and kings, that were mine! of crises that I dared, of — of things that I did!"

There was indignation and pride in the words, too much recollection of an actuality to rise from the reminiscences of a dream. John watched her alertly.

"Enough will happen here in time to divert you," he said.

She made a motion with her hand that swept the round of masonry about her.

"Not until this falls."

"Come, then, up into my fortress and see my fellows from Gischala," he offered. "They fled with me from that city when Titus took it and together we came to this place. They are hardened to disaster; they and death are fellow-jesters."

"Soldiers?"

"Everything! Better athletes than soldiers, better mummers than athletes; villains most engaging of all!"

She showed no interest and, after a critical pause, he continued:

"They robbed the booth of some costumer whom the Sadducees had made rich and captured a maid whom they held until she had taught them how to use henna and kohl. So I had a garrison of swearing girls until they wearied of the fatigue of stepping mincingly and untangling their garments. It was that which robbed the sport of its pleasure and changed my harem back to a fortress. But while it

lasted they were kings over Jerusalem. And what dear mad dangerous wantons they were! What confusion to short-sighted citizens; what affrights to sociable maidens! Even I laughed at them."

"What antics indeed!" she murmured perfunctorily.

"Now they want new entertainment; something immense and different," he said.

She looked up at him; in her eyes he read, "Even as I do!"

"But they are not unique in that," he continued. "All the world seeks diversion. Observe the pretty stranger come here fresh from some lady's tiring-room, hunting adventure, bearding thee and wearing thy name!"

Her eyes sparkled.

"She shall have adventure enough," she declared.

"I hear," John pursued, "that she does not expect her servant to return, whom she sent to Ascalon for proofs."

"No?" the woman cried, sitting up.

"How can she, when the siege is laid?"

There was a moment of silence. The woman drew in a deep breath that was wholly one of relief.

"Now what will she do?" she asked.

"She expects," John answered, "the mediation of the Messiah. It is the talk among the slaves that He is in the city and she has heard it. She seems not to be overconfident, however."

"It is her end," the woman remarked with meaning.

"Perchance not. She is a good Jew, it seems, whatever else she may be, and every good Jew may have his wishes come to pass if the Messiah come. So it has become the national habit to expect the Messiah in every individual difficulty. Now, according to prophecies, the time is of a surety ripe and the whole city is expectant. She may have her wish."

She stared at him coolly. There was implied disbelief in this speech. She debated with herself if it would serve to resent his doubt. Whatever her conclusion she added no more to the discussion of Laodice's hopes.

"Are you expectant?" she asked.

"I see the need of a Messiah," he responded.

"Doubtless. You and Simon do not unite the city; nothing but an united, confident and supremely capable people can resist Rome in even this most ma-

jestic fortification in the world — unless miracle be performed, indeed."

"Nothing but a divine visitor can achieve union here."

"What an event to behold!" she mused. "That would be an excitement! Surely that would be a new thing! No one really ever beheld a god before."

"What learned things dreams are! What things of experience!" he remarked with a sly smile. She refused to observe his insisted disbelief in her claim, but went on as if to herself.

"Whatever Jove can do, man can do!" she declared. "I never heard that the gods do more than change maidens into trees or themselves into swans for an old mortal purpose that even man's a better adept at. Why can there not rise one who is greater than Alexander and of stouter heart than Julius Cæsar? There is no limit to the greatness of mankind. Behold, here is a city rich beyond even the wealth of Crœsus; and a country which the emperor is longing to bestow upon some orderly king! Heavens, what an opportunity! I could pray, Jerusalem should pray, that the hour may bring forth the man!"

Her eyes shone with an unnatural yearning. The

immense scope of her desires suddenly brought a smile to his lips that he checked in time. He had remembered offering his Idumeans in women's clothing for her diversion.

Hunger for power, the next greatest hunger after hunger for love! He felt that he stood in the presence of a desire so immense that it belittled his own hopes. He was not too much of a Jew to have sympathy with the ambition that dwells in the breasts of women. Cleopatra had been an evil that he had admired profoundly, because she had attained that which his own soul yearned after but which had eluded him. Yet he was large enough not to be envious of a success. He was made of the stuff that seekers of excitement are made of. If he could not furnish the intoxication of activity he was a ready supporter of that one who could.

"What disorder, then, in the world," she went on, as if she had followed a train of imagination through the triumph of the risen great man. "Rome, the ruler of nations humbled! Conquest from Germany to the First Cataract, from Gaul to the dry rocks of Ecbatana! A world in anarchy, for one greater than Alexander to subjugate! The ancient splen-

dor of Asia, the wisdom of Africa and the virginity of Europe to be his, and the homage of the four corners of the earth to be to him!"

John said nothing. Before him, the woman had entirely stripped off her disguise. Now for the purpose!

At that moment one of Amaryllis' servants, who had stood guard without the door, dodged apprehensively into the room and fled across to the opposite arch. There he paused, ready for flight, and looked back with wide eyes. John turned hastily but with an impatient gesture fell again to his neglected meal. The actress looked to see what had annoyed him. There passed in from the outer corridor a young man, tall, magnificently formed, covered with a turban and draped in quaint garments, which to her who was familiar with all the guises of the theater seemed to be Buddhistic. He looked neither to the right nor left, but passed with a step infinitely soft and gliding across to the arch, from which the terrified servant vanished instantly. The stranger stayed only a dramatic instant on the threshold and then disappeared into the corridor which led up into the Temple. When he had gone the startled actress retained

a picture of a face, fearless, beatified, mystic to the very edge of the supernatural.

"Who was that?" she asked of the Gischalan, who was gazing at the color of his wine, sitting in a shaft of sunlight.

"Seraiah! But more than that, no one knows. He appeared with the slaying of Zechariah the Just. He haunts the garrisons. Hence his name — Soldier of Jehovah!"

"He did not speak; why did he come?"

"He never speaks; he goes where he will; no one would dare to stop him!"

Then suddenly realizing that he was showing disinterest the Gischalan drew himself up and smiled.

"He is mad; I believe he is mad. The city is full of demoniacs."

"There is something great about him!" the woman declared. "He seems to be the instrument of miracle."

"Is it that?" John asked in an amused tone.

She studied him for a moment that was tense with meaning.

"Do you know," she began slowly, "that neither you nor Simon, nor any of these who aspire to the

control of Jerusalem, have come upon the plan which will best appeal to your distracted subjects?"

"Have we not?" he repeated. "We have bought them and bullied them; we are fighting the Romans for them; we are preaching patience in the will of the Lord. What more, lady?"

"What have you to offer them in their hope of a Messiah?" she said pointedly.

"Messiah! What else is preached in the Temple but the Messiah, or in the proseuchæ or the streets or on the walls? We eat, drink, sleep, fight, buy, sell, rob or restore in the name of the Messiah! They are surfeited with religion."

"Are they?" she asked sententiously. "But you haven't given them a Messiah."

He looked at her without comprehending.

"You have a mad city here; you can not reason with it; indulge it, then, as you indulge your lunatics," she suggested.

He shook his head, smiling that he did not understand her. She turned again to Seraiah.

"Watch him," she insisted. "He possesses me."

After a long silence in which John trifled with his wine, she prepared to rise.

"Send me the roll of the law," the woman said suddenly.

"Posthumus shall bring it. He is another lunatic. Experiment with him and learn how I shall act toward the city."

"Well said," she averred; "and I will see your Idumeans. Is it proper for me to appear in the Temple?"

The Gischalan's eyes flashed a sudden elation and delight. He bent low and kissed her hand.

"And I will fetch somewhat which will divert us," she added and was gone.

When a few moments later John passed again into the Greek's apartment, Amaryllis entered from an inner corridor. Before she spoke to the master of the house she addressed a servant who had been a moment before summoned.

"Send hither my guest."

"The stranger?" John asked. "Is she still with you?"

"I mean to add her to my household, if you will," she explained.

"Keep her or dismiss her at your pleasure."

"It shall be for my pleasure. She has a charm

that besets me. It will be entertainment to discover her history."

"I see no mystery in her. It is plain enough that there is between her and this married Philadelphus some cause for her coming. His wife is much more engaging."

She sighed and dropped into her ivory chair, pushed back the locks of fair hair that had loosened from their fillet and waited languidly.

John studied her critically. In the last hour the slowly dissolving bond between them seemed to have vanished, wholly, at once.

"O Queen of Kings," he said, "art thou lonely in this mad place?"

"I have found diversion," she answered.

"With these new guests?"

"With these new guests. Observe them; there are a pair of lovers among them, mersed in difficulty, hampering themselves, multiplying sorrow and sure to accomplish the same end as if they had proceeded happily."

"Interested no longer in thine own passion? Alas, my Amaryllis, that love is dead that is interested no longer in itself."

"O thou bearded warrior, are we then still in the self-centered period of our romance?"

"I fear not; I see the twilight."

Amaryllis looked down and her face grew more weary.

"You have maintained a long fidelity, John," she said.

He gazed at her, waiting a further remark, and she went on at last.

"I wonder why?"

He flung out his hands.

"Shall I be faithless to Sheba? Is the charm of the Queen of Kings faded? Shall I turn from Aphrodite or weary of the lips of Astarte?"

"Nothing so stamps your love of me as wicked, in your own eyes, as the paganism you fall into when you speak of it!"

He laughed.

"But it is not that I am lovely which made you a lover — until now," she went on. "I have seen men faithful to women unlovely as Hecate. It is not that. And I am still as I was, but —"

He looked down on the triple bands of the ampyx that bound her gold-powdered hair and said:

"It is you who have grown weary; not I."

She astutely drew back from the ground upon which she had entered. It lay in the power of this Gischalan to refuse further protection to her out of sheer spite if she made her disaffection too patent.

"O leader of hosts, canst thou be mummer, languishing poet, pettish woman and spoiled princeling all in one? No! And I shall love the clanking of arms and thy mailed footsteps all the more if thou permittest me to look upon irresponsible folly while thou art absent."

"Have thy way. I have mine. Furthermore, I wish to thank thee for the companion thou sentest me at breakfast. He who dines alone with her, hath his table full. Farewell."

CHAPTER XV

THE IMAGE OF JEALOUSY

The Maccabee resolved that in spite of his heart-hunger, he must not be a frequent visitor to the house of Amaryllis because of the imminent risk of confronting the impostor Julian and the danger of exposure. Not danger to his life, but danger to his freedom to court the beautiful girl, which an unmasking might accomplish. Besides, he had made an extraordinary entry into the Greek's house in the beginning, and he was not prepared to explain himself even now, if he returned.

But his longing to look at her again was stronger than his caution. Much had happened since he had left the house of the Greek on the evening of his first day in Jerusalem, and he feared that his absorption in his own plans might result in the loss of her soon or late. So when the evening of the second week to a day of his sojourn in the city came round, un-

able to endure longer, he turned his steps with considerable apprehension toward the house of Amaryllis.

When he was led across the threshold of the Greek's hall, he saw Amaryllis sitting in her exedra, her slim white arms crossed back of her head, her tiring-woman, summoned for a casual attention, busy with a parted ribbon on the sandal of the lady's foot.

The Maccabee awaited her invitation. Her eyes flashed a sudden pleasure when she looked up and saw him.

"Enter," she said, with an unwonted lightness in her voice that was usually low and grave; "and be welcome."

He came to the place she indicated at her side and sat. In silence he waited until the tiring-woman had finished her service and departed. Then it was Amaryllis who spoke.

"You left us abruptly on occasion of your first visit."

"The siege was of greater interest to you than I was. When I discovered the cause of the disturbance, you would have failed to remember me."

"Yet I recall you readily after many days."

"The city is in disorder; conventions can not al-

ways be observed in war-time. I returned when I could."

"Our interest in you as our guest has not abated. Philadelphus is ready to see you, at any time," she said, watching his face.

"And in time of war," he answered composedly, "we intend many things in the first place which we do not carry out in the second. I do not care to see — Philadelphus."

She lifted her brows. He answered the implied question.

"I was a familiar to this Philadelphus; he is young and boastful, talkative as a woman. If he means to be king, as those who knew him in Ephesus were given to believe, it is not unnatural that some of us, without fortune or tie to keep us home, should follow him — as parasites, if you will — to share in the largess which he will surely give his friends if he succeeds."

He did not face her when he made this speech, and he did not observe the amusement that crept into her eyes. He could not sense his own greatness of presence sufficiently to know that his claim to be a parasite upon so incapable a creature as the false

Philadelphus would awaken doubt in the mind of an intelligent woman like Amaryllis.

He felt that he was not covering his tracks well, and put his ingenuity to a test.

"The boon-craver therefore should not sit like a dog, begging crumbs, till the table is laid. My hunger would appear as competition, if I showed it him, while he is yet unfed. Of a truth, I would not have him know I am here."

"I will keep thy secret," she promised, smiling.

"I thank you," he said gravely. "I came, on this occasion, to ask after the young woman, whose name I have not learned — her whom you have sheltered."

Amaryllis' smiling eyes darkened suddenly.

"Pouf!" she said. "I had begun to hope that you had come to see me!"

"I had not John's permission," he objected.

"Have you Philadelphus' permission to see her?"

He looked his perplexity.

"What," she exclaimed, "has she not laid her claim before you yet?"

The Maccabee shook his head.

"Know, then, that this pretty nameless creature claims to be the wife of this same Philadelphus."

He sat up in his earnestness.

"What!" he cried.

"Even so! Insists upon it in the face of the lady princess' proofs and Philadelphus' denial!"

The Maccabee's brows dropped while he gazed down at the Greek.

Julian of Ephesus was then the husband that she was to join in Jerusalem! Small wonder she had been indignant when he, the Maccabee, in the spirit of mischief, had laid a wife to Julian's door and had described her as most unprepossessing. And that was why her terror of Julian had been so abject! That was why she had flown to him, a stranger, rather than be left alone with a husband who, it seemed, would be rid of her that he might pursue his ends the better!

"What think you of it!" he exclaimed aloud, but to himself.

"And I never saw in all my life such pretensions of probity!" the Greek continued. "She is outraged by any little word that questions her virtue; she holds herself aloof from me as if she were not certain that I am fit for her companionship; and she flies with fluffed feathers and cries of rage in the face

of the least compliment that comes from any lips — even Philadelphus'!"

The Maccabee continued to gaze at the Greek. He did not see the woman's search of his face for an assent to her speech. He was struggling with a desire to tell her that he was eager to exchange his wife for Julian's.

"Perchance she is right," he said instead. "What know we of this paganized young Jew? He has been separated from his lady from childhood. It is right easy to marry, once we fall into the way."

"No, no! Her claim is hopeless. She confesses it. But she maintains the assumption, nevertheless."

"Absolutely? No little sign of lapse among thy handsome servants, here?"

"I do not see her when she is with the servants," she said astutely.

"What will you do with her?" he asked.

"She is beautiful, unique, and so eligible to my collection of arts and artists under this roof. She shall stay till fate shows its hand for all of us."

"You have housed Discord under your roof, then," he said. "Laodice, the wife to this Philadelphus, will not be a happy woman; and I — I shall

not be a happy man. Let me return favor for your favor to me. I will take her away."

She laughed, though it seemed that a hard note had entered her voice.

"You will permit me, then, to surmise for myself why you came to Jerusalem. You seem to have known this girl before. I shall not ask you; in return for that promise that I may conclude what I will."

"If you are too discerning, lady," he answered, while his eyes sought down the corridor for a glimpse of the one he had come to see, "you are dangerous."

"And what then?"

"I must devise a way to silence you."

She lifted her brows. In that very speech was the portrait of the Maccabee that she had come to love through letters.

"There is something familiar in your mood," she said thoughtfully. "It seems that I have known you — for many years."

He made no answer. He had said all that he wished to say to this woman. She noted his silence and rose.

"I shall send the girl to you."

"Thou art good," he answered and she withdrew.

A moment later Laodice came into the chamber. She was not startled. In her innocent soul she did not realize that this was a sign of the depth of her love for him. He rose and met her half-way across the hall; took her hand and held it while they walked back to the exedra, and gazed at her face for evidence that her sojourn in this house had been unhappy or otherwise; noted that she had let down her hair and braided it; observed every infinitesimal change that can attract only the lover's eye.

"Sit," he said, giving her a place beside him. "I came of habit to see you. Of habit, I was interrupted. Is there no way that I can talk to you without the resentment of some one who flourishes a better right to be with you than I can show?"

"Where hast thou been," Laodice asked, "so long?"

"Was it long," he demanded impulsively, "to you?"

"New places, new faces, uncertainty and other things make time seem long," she explained hastily.

"Nay, then," he said, "I have been busy. I have been attending to that labor I had in mind for

Judea, of which we spoke in the hills that morning."

Laodice drew in a quick breath. Then some one, if not herself or the husband who had denied her, was at work for Judea.

"There is no nation, here, for a king," he went on. "It is a great horde that needs organization. It wants a leader. I am ambitious and Judea will be the prize to the ablest man. Seest thou mine intent?"

"You — you aspire —" she began and halted, suddenly impressed with the complication his announcement had effected.

"Go on," he said.

"You would take Judea?"

"I would."

"But it belongs of descent to the Maccabees!"

"To Philadelphus Maccabaeus, yes; but what is he doing?"

She dropped her head.

"Nothing," she said in a half-whisper.

"No? But let me tell you what I have done already. Three days ago Titus took revenge upon Coenopolis for her sortie against Nicanor by firing

the suburbs. The citizens could not spare water to fight the fire, and after futile attempts they gathered up food and treasure and fled into Jerusalem. Now, a thousand householders in the streets of this oppressed city, with their gods and their goods in their arms, made the pillagers of Simon and John laugh aloud. They fell upon these wandering, bewildered, treasure-laden people and robbed them as readily and as joyously as a husbandman gathers olives in a fat year. Oh, it was a merry time for the men of Simon and the men of John! But I in my wanderings over the city came upon a party of Bezethans, reluctant to surrender their goods for the asking, and they were fighting with right good will a body of Idumeans twice their number. In fact they fought so well, so unanimously, so silently that I saw they lacked the essential part of the fight — the shouting. That I supplied. And when they had whipped the Idumeans and had a chance for flight before reinforcements came, they obeyed my voice in so far as they followed me into a subterranean chamber beneath a burned ruin on Zion.

"We were not followed and our hiding-place was not discovered. In fact, their resistance was a com-

plete success. Whereupon, they were ready to unite and take Jerusalem! No — it was not strange! It is the nature of men. I never saw a wine-merchant in Ephesus, who, after clearing his shop of brawlers single-handed, was not ready thereupon to march upon Rome and besiege Cæsar on the Palatine! So it was with these Bezethans.

"I, with my voice, expressed the yearnings that they felt in their victorious breasts, and plotted for them. After council and organization we went forth by night and finding Idumean patrols by the score sleepy and inert from overfeeding we robbed them of that which was our own. Then we sought out hungry Bezethans and fed them when they promised to become of our party. Nothing was more simple! By dawn we had a hundred under our ruin, bound to us by oath and the enticements of our larder, and hungry only for fight! Will you believe me when I boast that I have an army in Jerusalem?"

She heard him with a strange confusion of emotions. In her soul she was excited and eager for his success; but here was a strong and growing enemy to Philadelphus, who was reluctant to become a king!

Her impulsive joy in a forceful man struggled with her sense of duty to the man she could not love.

"Why do you tell me these things?" she said uneasily. "It is perilous for any one to know that you are constructing sedition against these ferocious powers in Jerusalem."

"Ah, but you fear for me; therefore you will not betray me. None else but those as deeply committed know of it."

He had confided in her, and because of it his ambitions took stealthy hold upon her.

"But — but is there no other way to take Jerusalem, except — by predatory warfare?" she hesitated.

"No," he laughed. "We are fighting thieves and murderers; they do not understand the open field; we must go into the dark to find them."

"Then — then if your soldiers have the good of the city and the love of their fellows in their hearts, and if you feed them and shelter them — why shall you not succeed?" she asked, speaking slowly as the sum of his advantages occurred to her.

He dropped his hand on hers.

"It lacks one thing; if I have discouragement in

my soul, it will weaken my arm, and so the arm of all my army."

Intuition bade her hesitate to ask for that essential thing; his eyes named it to her and she looked away from him quickly that he might not see the sudden flush which she could not repress.

"Tell me," she said, "more of that night —"

"That would be recounting the same incident many times. But one thing unusual happened; nay, two things. In the middle of the night, after we had brought in our second enlistment of patriots, we were feeding them and I was giving them instruction. At the entrance, I had posted a sentry; none of us believed that any one had seen us take refuge in that crypt. Indeed, we were all frank in our congratulations and defiant in our security. Suddenly, I saw half of my army scuttle to cover; the rest stood transfixed in their tracks. I looked up and there before me in the firelight stood a young man, whom I had not, I am convinced, brought in with me. He was tall, comely, dressed as I have seen the Hindu priests dress in Ephesus, but in garments that were fairly radiant for whiteness. But his face gave cause enough to make any man lose his tongue. Believe

me, when I say he looked as if he had seen angels, and had talked with the dead. His eyes gazed through us as if we had been thin air. So dreadful they were in their unseeing look that every man asked himself what would happen if that gaze should light upon him. He stood a moment, walked as soft-footed and as swiftly as some shade through our burrow and vanished as he had come. In all the time he tarried, he made not one sound!"

Laodice was looking at him with awed, but understanding eyes.

"It was Seraiah," she said in a low voice. "He entered this place on a day last week. All the city is afraid of him."

"So my soldiers told me afterward, between chattering teeth. He almost damped our patriotism. We uttered our bombast, sealed our vows and made our sorties, thereafter, every man of us, with our chins over our shoulders! Spare me Seraiah! He has too much influence!"

"Is he a madman?" she asked.

"Or else a supernatural man. Would I could manage men by the fall of my foot, as he does. I should have Jerusalem's fealty by to-morrow night.

But it was near early morning that the other incident occurred. That was of another nature. We stumbled upon a pair huddled in the shadow of a building. We stumbled upon many figures in shadows, but one of these murmured a name that I heard once in the hills hereabout, and I had profited by that name, so I halted. It was an old man, starved and weary and ill; with him was a gray ghost of a creature with long white hair, that seemed to be struck with terror the instant it heard my voice. At first I thought it was a withered old woman, but it proved to be a man — somehow seeming young in spite of the snow-white hair and wasted frame. I had them taken up, the gray ghost resisting mightily, and carried to my burrow where they now lie. They eat; they take up space; they add nothing to my cause. But I can not turn them out. The old man disarms me by that name."

He looked down at her with softening eyes.

"And the shepherd held thy hand?" he said softly. She turned upon him in astonishment. How much of joy and surprise and hope he could bring in a single visit, she thought. Now, behold he had met

that same delightsome child that had passed like a dash of sunlight across her dark day.

"Did you meet the shepherd of Pella?" she asked. Instant deduction supplied her the name that had moved him to compassion. "And did he serve you in the name of his Prophet?" she whispered.

"He saved my life in the name of his Christ, but was tender of me in thy name," he replied.

"His is a sweet apostasy," she ventured bravely, "if it be his apostasy that made him kind. And I — I owe him much, that he repaired that for which I feel at fault."

He smiled at her and stroked her hand once, soothingly.

"Let us not remember blames or injury. It damages my happiness. But of this apostasy that the shepherd preached me. I passed the stones of the Palace of Antipas to-day, a ruin, black and shapeless. Thought I, where is the majesty of order and the beauty of strength that was this place? And then," his voice fell to a whisper, "beshrew the boy's tattle, I said, the footprints of his Prophet before the throne of Herod are erased."

"Even then," she whispered when he paused, "you do not forget!"

"No! Why, these streets, that should ring for me with the footsteps of all the great from the days of David, are marked by the passage of that Prophet. I might forget that Felix and Florus and Gessius were legates in that Roman residence, but I do not fail to remember that they took that Prophet before Pilate there. By my soul, the street that leads north hath become the way of the Cross, and there are three crosses for me on the Hill of the Skull!"

She looked at him gravely and with alarm. What was it in this history of the Nazarene which won aristocrats and shepherds alike? She would see from this man if there were indeed any truth in the story that Philadelphus had told her.

"I have heard," she began, faltering, "I have heard that —" She stopped. Her tongue would not shape the story. But after a glance at her, he understood.

"And thou hast heard it, also?" he whispered. "Thou believest it?"

It seemed that to acknowledge her fear that the King had come and gone would establish the fact.

"No!" she cried.

"It is enough," he said nervously. "We do not well to talk of it. I came for another reason. Tell me; hast thou other shelter than this house?"

"No," she answered.

"Hast thou talked with this Philadelphus, here?" he asked after silence.

She assented with averted face.

"Is he that one who was with me in the hills?" he persisted.

Again she assented, with surprise.

His hands clenched and for a moment he struggled with his rage.

"This house is no place for you!" he declared at last.

"What manner of house is this?" she asked pathetically. "It is so strange!"

"Why did you come here?"

"Because there was nowhere else to go."

He was silent.

"Who is this Amaryllis?" she asked.

"John's mistress."

She shrank away from him and looked at him with horror-stricken eyes.

"Hast thou not yet seen him, who buys thy bread and meat and insures this safe roof?" he persisted.

"And — and I eat bread — bought — bought by —" she stammered.

"Even so!"

Her hands dropped at her sides.

"Are the good all dead?" she said.

"In Jerusalem, yes; for Virtue gets hungry, at times."

She had risen and moved away from him, but he followed her with interested eyes.

"Then — then —" she began, hesitating under a rush of convictions. "That is why — why I can not — why he — he —"

He knew she spoke of Philadelphus.

"Go on," he said.

"Why I can not live in safety near him!"

He, too, arose. Until that moment it had not occurred to him that Julian of Ephesus, as repugnant to her as she had shown him ever to be, might prove a peril to her life as he had been to the Maccabee who had stood in his way.

"What has he said to you?" he demanded fiercely. "How do you live, here in this house?"

She threw up her head, seeing another meaning in his question.

"Shut in! Locked!" she said between her teeth.

"But even then you are not safe!"

She drew back hastily and looked at him with alarm. What did he mean?

He was beside her.

"Tell me, in truth, who you are," he said tenderly, "and I shall reveal myself."

Then, indeed, Amaryllis had told him her claim and had convinced him that it was fraudulent.

"And she told you?" she said wearily.

"Tell me," he insisted. "I have truly a revelation worth hearing!"

She made no answer.

"You owe it me," he added presently. "Behold what damaging things I have intrusted to you. You can ruin me by the droop of an eyelash."

"I should have told you at first who I am," she said finally. "I will not betray what you told me in ignorance —"

"But Amaryllis told me this before you came."

"Nevertheless, tell me no more; if I must be a partizan, I shall be a partizan to my husband."

"There is nothing for you here, clinging to this man," he continued persuasively. "This woman brought him a great dowry. She is ambitious and therefore jealous. You will win nothing but mistreatment, and worse, if you stay here for him."

"It is my place," she said.

After a moment's helpless silence, he demanded bitterly:

"Dost thou love that man?"

The truth leaped to her lips with such wilful force that he read the reply on her face, though her eyes were down and by intense resolution she restrained the denial. He was close to her, speaking quickly under the pressure of his earnestness.

"I have sacrificed name, birthright, fortune — even honor — that I might be free to love thee!"

She drew back from him hurriedly, afraid that his very insistence would destroy her fortitude.

"Let me not have bankrupted myself for a trust thou wilt not give!"

"It — it is not mine to give," she stammered.

"Otherwise — otherwise —" he prompted, leaning near her. But she put him back from her, desperately.

"Go, go!" she whispered. "I hear — I hear Philadelphus!"

He turned from her obediently.

"It is not my last hope," he said to himself. "Neither has she suffered her last perplexity in this house. I shall come again."

He passed out into the streets of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SPREAD NET

Beginning with the moment that the Maccabee first entered her hall, Amaryllis struggled with a perplexity. Certain discrepancies in the hastily concocted story which that stern compelling stranger who had called himself Hesper of Ephesus had told had started into life a doubt so feeble that it was little more than a sensation.

Love and its signs had been a lifelong study to her; she knew its stubbornness; she was wise in the judgment of human nature to know that love in this stranger was no light thing to be dislodged. And to finish the sum of her perplexities, she felt in her own heart the kindling of a sorrowful longing to be preferred by a spirit strong, forceful and magnetic as was that of the man who had called himself Hesper of Ephesus.

With the egotism of the courtezan she summarized

her charms. Even there were spirits in that fleshly land of Judea to whom the delicate refinement of her beauty, the reserve of her bearing and the power of her mentality had appealed more strongly than a mere opulence of physical attraction. She had her ambitions; not the least of these was to be loved by an understanding nature. The greater the congeniality, the greater the attraction, she argued; but behold, was this iron Hesper, the man of all force, to be dashed and shaken by the rich loveliness of Laodice, who was simply a woman?

"Such attachments do not last," she argued hopefully. "Such attachments make unfaithful husbands. They are monotonous and wearisome. She is but a mirror giving back the blaze of the sun, one-surfaced and blinding. It is the many lights of the diamond that make it charming."

She had arrived at no definite resolution when she met Laodice in the hall that led to the quarters of the artists, as the Greek went that way for her day's observation of their work.

"What an unrefreshed face!" the Greek said softly, as the light from the cancelli showed the weariness and distress that had begun to make inroads

on the animation of the girl's beauty. "No woman who would preserve her loveliness should let her cares trouble her dreams."

"How am I to do that?" Laodice asked with a flare of scorn.

"Do I perceive in that a desire for advice or an explanation of a situation?"

"Both."

Amaryllis smiled thoughtfully at the girl, while the light of sudden intent appeared on her face.

"You are unhappy, my dear, through your prejudices," she began. "We call convictions prejudices when they are other than our own beliefs. By that sign, you shall know that I am going to take issue with you. I am, perhaps, the ideal of that which you would not be. But no man will say that my lot is not enviable."

"Are you happy?" Laodice asked in a low voice.

"Are you?" the Greek returned. "No," she went on after a pause. "A woman has the less happy part in life, though the greater one, if she will permit herself to make it great. It was not her purpose on earth to be happy, but to make happy."

"You take issue with Philadelphus in that," Lao-

dice interposed. "It is his preachment to me that all that is expected of all mankind is to be happy."

"He is a man, arguing from the man's view. It is inevitable law that one must be gladder than another. Woman has the greater capacity for suffering, hence her feeling for the suffering of others is the quicker to respond. And some creature of the gods must be compassionate, else creation long since had perished from the earth."

Laodice made no answer. This was new philosophy to her, who had been taught only to aspire at great sacrifice as long as God gave her strength. She could not know that this strange and purposeful creed might some day appeal to her beyond her strength.

"Yet," Amaryllis added presently in a brighter tone, "there is much that is sweet in the life of a woman."

Laodice played with the tassels of her girdle and did not look up. What was all this to lead to?

"I have spoken to Philadelphus about you," the Greek continued. "He has no doubt of this woman who hath established her claim to his name by proofs but without the manner of the wife he expected.

Yet he can not turn her out. The siege hath put an end to your efforts in your own behalf and it is time to face your condition and make the best of it. John feels restive; I dare not ask too much of him. My household was already full, before you came."

Laodice was looking at her, now with enlightenment in her face.

"Philadelphus," Amaryllis continued, following up her advantage, "is nothing more than a man and you are very lovely."

"All this," Laodice said, rousing, "is to persuade me to —"

"There are two standards for women," the Greek interposed before Laodice finished her indignant sentence. "Yours and another's. As between yours, who would have love from him whom you have married, and hers, who hath love from him whom she hath not married, there is only the difference of a formula. Between her condition and yours, she is the freer; between her soul and yours, she is the more willingly faithful. If woman be born to a purpose, she fulfils it; if not she hath not consecrated her life to a mistake. You overrate the importance of marriage. It is your whole purpose to preserve yourself

for a ceremony. It is too much pains for too trivial an end. At least, there are many things which are farther reaching and less selfish in intent. And who, by the way, holds the longest claim on history? Your kind or this other? The world does not perpetuate in its chronicles the continence of women; it is too small, too personal, too common to be noted. Cleopatra were lost among the horde of forgotten sovereigns, had she wedded duly and scorned Mark Antony; Aspasia would have been buried in a gynaeconitis had she wedded Pericles, and Sappho — but the list is too long; I will not bury you in testimony."

Laodice raised her head.

"You reason well," she said. "It never occurred to me how wickedness could justify itself by reason. But I observe now how serviceable a thing it is. It seems that you can reason away any truth, any fact, any ideal. Perhaps you can banish God by reason, or defend crime by reason; reason, I shall not be surprised to learn, can make all things possible or impossible. But — does reason hush that strange speaking voice in you, which we Jews call conscience? Tell me; have you reasoned till it ceases to rebuke you?"

"Ah, how hard you are to accommodate," Amaryllis smiled. "I mean to show you how you can abide here. I can ask no more of John. Philadelphus alone is master of your fate. I have not sought to change you before I sought to change Philadelphus. He will not change so long as you are beautiful. This is life, my dear. You may as well prepare for it now."

Laodice gazed with wide, terrorized eyes at the Greek. She saw force gathering against her. Amaryllis shaped her device to its end.

"And if you do not accept this shelter," she concluded, "what else is there for you?"

Hesper, many times her refuge, rose before the hard-pressed girl.

"There is another in Jerusalem who will help me," she declared.

"And that one?" Amaryllis asked coolly.

"Is he who calls himself Hesper, the Ephesian," Laodice answered.

"Why should you trust him?" the Greek asked pointedly.

"He — when Philadelphus — you remember that Philadelphus told you what happened —"

"That he tossed a coin with a wayfarer in the hills for you?" the Greek asked.

Laodice dropped her head painfully.

"This Hesper let me go then, and afterward —"

"He has repented of that by this time. It is not safe to try him a second time. Besides, if you must risk yourself to the protection of men, why turn from him whom you call your husband for this stranger?"

The question was deft and telling. Laodice started with the suddenness of the accusation embodied in it. And while she stood, wrestling with the intolerable alternative, the Greek smiled at her and went her way.

Laodice stood where Amaryllis had left her, at times motionless with helplessness, at others struck with panic. On no occasion did homelessness in the war-ridden city of Jerusalem appear half so terrible as shelter under the roof of that hateful house.

The little golden-haired girl from the chamber of artists beyond skipped by her.

"Hast seen Demetrius?" she called back as she passed. "Demetrius, the athlete, stupid!"

Laodice turned away from her.

"Nay, then," the girl declared; "if I have insulted

you let me heal over the wound with the best jest, yet! John hath written a sonnet on Philadelphus' wife and our Lady Amaryllis is truing his meter for him. Ha! Gods! What a place this is for a child to be brought up! I would not give a denarius for my morals when I am grown. There's Demetrius! Now for a laugh!"

She was gone.

Where was that ancient rigor of atmosphere in which she had been reared? thought Laodice. Had it existed only in the shut house of Costobarus? Was all the world wicked except that which was confined within the four walls of her father's house? Could she survive long in this unanimously bad environment? But she remembered Joseph of Pella, the shepherd; even then his wholesomeness was not without its canker. He was a Christian!

Philadelphus was at her side.

She flinched from him and would have fled, but he stopped her with a sign.

"My lady objects to your presence in this house," he said. "You have not made it worth my while to insist on your shelter here."

"Your lady," she said hotly, "is two-fold evilly

engaged, then. She has time to ruin you, while she furnishes John with all the inspiration he would have for sonnets."

"So she refrains from furnishing John with my two hundred talents, I shall not quarrel with her. You have your own difficulties to adjust, and mine, only in so far as they concern you."

His voice had lost none of its smoothness, but it had become hard and purposeful.

"I have come to that point, Philadelphus, where my difficulties and not yours concern me," she replied. "I had nothing to give you but my good will. You have outraged even that. Hereafter, no tie binds us."

"No? You cast off our ties as lightly as you assumed them. With a word you announce me wedded to you; with another you speak our divorcement. And I, poor clod, suffer it? The first, yes; but the last, no. You see, I have fallen in love with you."

She turned her clear eyes away from him and waited calmly till she could escape.

"You have spent your greatest argument in persuading me to be a king. Kings, lady, are essentially tyrants, in these bad days. Wherefore, if I

am to be one, I shall not fail to be the other. And you — ah, you! Will you endure the oppressor that you made?"

There was enough that was different in his manner and his words for her to believe that something worthy of attention was to follow. She looked at him, now.

"This roof, since the alienation of John to my wife, is mine empire. Within it, I am despot. From its lady mistress, the Greek, to the meanest slave, I have homage and subjection. Even thou wilt be submissive to me — for having lost one wife through indulgence, I shall be most tyrannical to the one yet in my power!"

She drew herself up in splendid defiance.

"I have not submitted!" she said. "I will not submit!"

"No? Nothing stands in your way now but yourself. Your supplanter hath removed herself. And I shall make your submission easy."

She turned from him and would have hurried back into the Greek's andronitis, but he put himself in her way.

"Listen!" he said, suddenly lifting his hand.

In the stillness which she finally was able to observe over the tumultuous beating of her enraged heart, a profound moan of great volume as from immense but remote struggle came into the corridor. Through it at times cut a sharp accession of sound, as if violence heightened at intervals, and steadily over it pulsated the throb of tireless siege-engines. It was the groan of the City of Delight in mortal anguish.

"This," he said in a soft voice touching his breast, "or that," motioning toward the dying city. "Choose. And by midnight!"

While she stood, gazing at him transfixed with the horror of her predicament, there was the sweeping of garments, the soft tinkle of pendants as they struck together, and Salome, the actress, was beside the pair. Close at hand was Amaryllis. The Greek showed for the first time discomfiture and an inability to rise to the demand of the occasion. The glance she shot at Laodice was full of cold anger that she had permitted herself to be surprised in company with Philadelphus.

Philadelphus drew back a step, but made no further movement toward withdrawing. Laodice would have

retreated, but the actress stood in her way. With a motion full of stately indignation, Salome turned to Amaryllis.

"It so occurs, madam, that I can point out to you the disease which saps my husband's ambition. You observe that he is diverted now, as all men are diverted six weeks after marriage — by another woman. I am not a jealous woman. I am only concerned for his welfare and the welfare of the city of our fathers. For it is not himself that his luxurious indolence affects; but all the unhappy city which is suffering while he is able to help it. He must be saved. And I shall go with him out of this house into want and peril, but he shall be saved."

Laodice said nothing. She stood drawn up intensely; her brows knitted; her teeth on her lip; her insulted pride and growing resolution effecting a certain magnificence in her pose.

"I can find her another house," Amaryllis said.

"Also my husband can find it," the woman broke in. "Let the streets do their will with the woman of the streets. Bread and shelter are too precious to waste on the iniquitous this hour."

Amaryllis turned to Laodice.

"What wilt thou do?" she asked.

"The streets can offer me no more insult than is offered me in this house," she said slowly.

It was in her mind that there were certainly unprotected gates at which she could get out of the city and return to Ascalon.

At least the peril for her in this house was already too imminent for her to remain longer. She continued to Amaryllis:

"Lady, you have been kind to me — in your way. You have been so in the face of your doubt that I am what I claim to be. How happy, then, you would have made my lot had I not been supplanted and denied! For all this I thank you. Mine would be a poor gratitude if I stay to make you regret your generosity. Wherefore I will go."

She slipped past the three and entered her room. Before Amaryllis could gather resolution to protest, she was out again, clothed in mantle and vitta and, walking swiftly, disappeared into the vestibule. As they sat in the darkening hall, the three heard the doors close behind her.

"She will return," said Philadelphus coolly, moving away.

Gathering her robes about her, Salome swept out of the corridor and away. Amaryllis stood alone.

Somewhere out in the city was Hesper the Ephesian. Amaryllis knew that Laodice would not return.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TANGLED WEB

Meanwhile Jerusalem was in the fury of barbarous warfare. At this ravine and that debouching upon Golgotha, the Vale of Hinnom and the Valley of Tophet, whole legions of besiegers were stationed. Along the walls the men of Simon and the men of John tramped in armor. From the various gates furious sorties were made by swarms of unorganized Jews who fell upon the Romans unused to frantic warfare, and slaughtered, set fire to engines, destroyed banks and threw down fortifications and retreated within the gates before the demoralized Romans could rally.

Catapult and ballista upon the eminences outside the walls kept up an unceasing rain of enormous stones which whistled and screamed in the air and shook Jerusalem to its foundations. The reverberating boom and the tremor of earth were varied from

time to time by the splintering crash of houses crushing and the increase of uproar, as scores of luckless inhabitants went down under the falling rock. Giant cranes with huge, ludicrous awkward arms, heaved up pots of burning pitch and oil and flung them ponderously into the city to do whatever horror of fire and torture had not been done by the engines. Hourly the rattle of small stones increased, merely to attract the attention of the citizens to an activity to which they were so accustomed that it was almost unnoticed. At times citizens and soldiers rushed upon a threatened gate or segment of the wall and lent strength to keep the Romans out; at other times the defenses were forsaken while the besieged fell upon one another. Back from the broad summit of Olivet, which was the mountain of peace, the echoes gave all day long the shudder of the struggling city.

The sun daily grew more heated; the cisterns and pools within the city began to shrink so rapidly that the inhabitants feared that the enemy had come at the source of the waters of Jerusalem and had cut them off. Hundreds of the wounded were allowed to die, simply as a defense of the wells and storehouses. Burial became too gigantic a labor, and John

and Simon ordered the bodies thrown over the walls to prevent pestilence.

Titus riding around the city on a day came upon a heap of this outcast dead and turned suddenly white. He rode back to his camp and within the hour there approached the walls under a flag of truce an imposing Jew of middle-age, with a superb beard and a veritable mantle of rich black hair escaping from his turban and falling heavy with life and strength upon a pair of great shoulders. He was simply dressed, but his stately carriage and splendid presence made a kingly garment out of his white gown.

Those upon the wall knew him and though they were obliged to respect the banner under which he approached, they gnashed their teeth and greeted him with epithets, poisonous with hate. He was Flavius Josephus, one time patriot and enemy of Rome, but now secure under Titus' patronage, abettor of his patron against his fellow-countrymen.

The Maccabee, among the fighting-men on the wall, saw his approach and discreetly stepped behind a soldier that he might not be singled out as a familiar toward which the approaching mediator would logically direct his appeal. He had no desire

to be addressed by his name before this precarious mob already mad with rage at a turncoat.

And thus concealed the Maccabee heard Josephus appeal to the Jews with apparent sincerity and affection, promise amnesty, protection and justice in his patron's name; heard his overtures greeted with fury and finally saw the Jews swarm over the walls and drive him to fly for his life up Gareb to the camp of Titus.

It was not the first incident he had seen which showed him his own fate if it became known that he intended to treat with Rome. He put aside his calculations in that direction as a detail not yet in order, and turned to the organization of his army. Here again he met obstacle.

Among his council of Bezethans he found an enthusiasm for some intangible purpose, objection to his own plans and a certain hauteur that he could not understand.

"What is it you hope for, brethren?" he asked one night as he stood in the gloom of the crypt under the ruin with fifty of his ablest thinkers and soldiers about him.

"The days of Samuel before Israel cursed itself

with a king," one man declared. The others were suddenly silent.

"Those days will not come to you," he answered patiently. "You must fight for them."

"We will fight."

"Good! Let us unite and I will lead you," the Maccabee offered.

"But after you have led us, perhaps to victory, then what?" they asked pointedly.

The Maccabee saw that they were sounding him for his ambitions, and discreetly effaced them.

"Do with me what you will; or if you doubt me, choose a leader among yourselves."

They shook their heads.

"Then enlist under Simon and John and fight with them," he cried, losing patience.

Murmurs and angry looks greeted this suggestion, and the Maccabee put out his hands toward them hopelessly.

"Then what will you do?" he asked.

"It shall be shown us," they replied; and with this answer, with his organization yet uneffected, his plans more than ever chaotic, the Maccabee began another day. Shrewd and resourceful as he believed himself

to be, he beheld plan after plan reveal its inefficiency. Forced by some act of the city to abandon one idea, the next that followed found a new intractability. It seemed that there were no two heads in Jerusalem of a similar thought. Whoever was not demoralized by panic was fatally stubborn or mad. The single purpose that seemed to prevail was to hold out against reason.

Finally he determined to pick the most rational of his men and shape an army that would be distinctly Jewish and enviable. Nothing Roman should mar its organization. He would have again the six hundred Gibborim of David, and after he had formed them into a body he would trust to the existing circumstances to direct him how to proceed to the assistance of Jerusalem with them. He should be the sole captain, the sole authority, the single commander of them all. He would not have an unwieldy army, but one perfectly devoted. He would lead by his own genius, attract and command by his own personality. With six hundred absolutely subject to his will, trained in endurance and steadfastness, he could achieve more surely than with an undisciplined horde which first of all must be fed.

Throughout those days of predatory warfare he made careful selection of material for his army. As yet, while famine had not reduced Jerusalem to a skeleton, he could select for bodily strength and mental balance. He worked swiftly, sparing his men daily to the defense of the city against the Roman and daily sacrificing precious numbers of them to the pit of the dead just over the wall.

They were weary days — days of increasing storm and multiplying calamity. Famine in some quarters of the city reached appalling proportions. Insurrections in these regions were so vigorously suppressed that the victims chose to starve and live rather than to revolt and perish. Pestilence broke out among the inhabitants near the eastern wall, against the other side of which the dead had been cast by hundreds; and a general flight from the city was stopped in full flood by the spectacle of some scores of unfortunates crucified by the Roman soldiers and set up in sight of the walls.

Simon and John had a disastrous quarrel and during the interval, when the sentries and the fighting-men were killing each other, the Romans possessed the first fortification around Jerusalem, the Wall of

Agrippa. The following day Titus pitched his camp within the limits of the Holy City, upon the site of Sennacherib's Assyrian bivouac.

At sight of this signal advance, tumult broke out afresh in the city and for days Titus lay calmly by, merely harassing the Jews while he watched Jerusalem weaken itself by internal combat. The Maccabee, steadily training his picked Gibborim, saw these lulls as signs that Titus was still in the hope that the city would submit to occupation and spare him the repugnant task of slaughtering half a nation. In his soul he knew that at no time would Titus be unwilling to receive the voluntary capitulation of the city.

So, composed and intent through struggle and terror, he continued to prepare for the day when an organized army could take the unhappy inhabitants out of the bloody hands of the two factionists, Simon and John.

During one of the casual attacks on the Second Wall, a lean, lash-scarred maniac that had not ceased to cry night or day for seven years, "Woe unto Jerusalem!" mounted the Old Second Wall, and there pointed to his breast and added, "Woe unto me

also!" At that instant a great stone struck him and tumbling with it to the ground, he was crushed into the earth and left so buried for all time.

With the hushing of that embodiment of doom, silence fell upon the city and after that, panic; and during that Titus heaved his four legions against the Second Wall and took it. Simon was seized with frenzy, and with a body of crazed Idumeans rushed out upon the banks of the Romans and in one hour's time overthrew the army's work of days and so thoroughly set back the advance of the besieger that Titus resolved that no more insane sorties should be made from the gates.

He retired to his camp and in a short time soldiers appeared with tape, stakes, sledges and spades and laid out an immense circle, all but compassing the great city of Jerusalem.

The Maccabee saw all this. He stood on the wall above the roar and frenzy and looked across bleached stretches of sunny, rocky earth toward the orderly ranks of soldiers, the simple business, the tranquil speed of Rome making war, and understood that peaceful despatch as deadly.

He saw the young general ride down to this circle,

dismount and, catching a spade from the nearest legionary, drive it into the earth. When he tossed out the first clay, each of the men in the visible segment of that great cordon struck his implement into the ground. And even as the Maccabee watched, he saw grow up under his eyes a wall!

He understood. Titus was walling against a wall; turning upon the Jews that same thing which they had reared against him. As the Maccabee stood gazing transfixed at this grim work, he heard beside him an old voice say, with terrible conviction:

"*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! . . . For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*"

The Maccabee, shaken with the culmination of Rome's resolution and afraid in spite of himself,

whirled angrily upon that voice speaking doom at his side. There in the old ragged tunic bound about him with rope, stood the old man he had rescued and had sheltered persistently for many days.

The old man faced the young man's rage with supernatural composure and strength. With clenched hands, the Maccabee stood away from him and felt that he threatened with his fists a hoary citadel that armies had beaten themselves against in vain.

The Maccabee did not speak to his old pensioner. He felt the futility of words against this thing which seemed to be a revelation, denying absolutely all of his ambitions. He dropped from his position and, pushing his way through the distress upon the city, turned toward the house of Amaryllis. It was a climacteric hour, when men should look well to the protection of all that was near and dear to them.

When he was gone a strange, bent figure with long white hair and a gray distorted face came from the shadow of one of the towers and plucked the old Christian's tunic. The Christian turned and seeing who stood beside him said with intense surety in his tones:

"It is proven. Accept the Lord Jesus while it is

time, my son, for behold the hour of the last day of this city is fulfilled!"

The apparition lifted a palsied hand on which the skin was yet fair and young and pointed after the Maccabee, losing himself in the groaning mass in the city.

"If I believe, I must tell him!" he said.

"Whatever thou hast done against that man must be amended," the Christian declared.

The palsied figure shrank and wringing his hands about each other said in a whisper that sounded like wind among dried leaves:

"I, who saw the candor of perfect trust in his eyes, once, I can not behold their reproach — I, who love him, and sold him — for a handful of gold!"

The old Christian laid his hand on the other's arm.

"Another Judas?" he said. The apparition made no answer.

"Nay, then; tell it me," the Christian urged. But the other shrank away from him, while distrust collected in his eyes.

"I fear thee; the evil man fears the good one, even more than the good man fears the evil one. I will not tell thee."

"But thou hast thy bread from this Hesper; thou hast thy shelter from him. He will not injure thee."

"Injure me! Not with his hands, perhaps. But he would look at me, he would kill me with his eyes! Thou canst not dream what evil I have done him!"

The old Christian looked at him for a time, but with the hopefulness of the spiritually confident.

"Christ spare thee, till thou hast the strength to do right!" he exclaimed. But the palsied man covered his face with his hands and groaned. The old Christian took him by the arm and led him down from the wall and back to the cavern under the ruins.

"In thy good time, O Lord," he said to himself, beginning with that incident a ministry that should not end.

It was dark when the Maccabee came down into the ravine in which the Greek's house was builded. In the shadow the house cast before it he saw some one pass the sentry lines. The soldiers looked after that figure. Presently, emerging into the lesser darkness of the open streets, it proved to be a woman. The Maccabee stopped. By the movements, now hurried, now slow, he believed that the night was full of apprehension for this unknown faring into the dis-

ordered city. She was coming in his direction. He stepped into shadow to see who would come forth from shelter at such an hour.

The next instant she hurried by his hiding-place and the Maccabee saw with amazement that it was the girl he loved. He sprang out to speak to her, but the sound of his footsteps frightened her and she ran.

The whole hilly foreground of Jerusalem was lifted like a black and impending cloud over her, a-throb with violence and strife. Here and there were lights on the bosom of the looming blackness, but they only emphasized the darkness pressing on the outskirts of the radiance. Every area way and alley had its sound. The air was full of footsteps; behind her a voice called to her. She dashed by yawning darkness that was an open alley, hurried toward lights, halted precipitately at signals of danger and veered aside at unexpected sounds. Once she stumbled upon the body of a sleeper who had come down into the darkness of the ravine to pass the night. At her suppressed cry the Maccabee sprang forward, but she caught herself and ran faster.

He ceased then to attempt to stop her. Curiosity to know what brought her out into danger at night

impelled him to follow near enough to protect her, but unsuspected until she had revealed her mission to him.

A hungry dog, probably the last one to escape the execution which had been meted out to all useless consumers of food, barked at her heels and brought her up sharply.

The beast in his siege of her circled in the dark around near enough to the Maccabee hidden in the darkness for him to deliver a vindictive kick in the staring ribs of the brute. When the howl of the surprised dog faded up the black ravine, Laodice ran on. The Maccabee, silently pursuing, heard with a contracting heart that she was crying softly from terror and bewilderment. Not yet, however, had she approached the danger of Jerusalem, which John had kept far removed from the precincts of Amaryllis' house.

She was entering Akra. The heap of grain, yet burning, showed a dull black-red mound over which towered a column of strong incense. Here, for the night was cool, lay in circles many of the unhoused Passover guests. Here, also, was wakefulness and the hatchment of evil.

The running girl was upon them before she knew it. One of the figures that sat with its back to the dull glow saw her approaching. Instantly he rose upon one knee and snatched her dress as she ran.

Jerked from her balance, she screamed and threw out her hands to keep from falling upon the shoulders of her assailant. One or two others with unintelligible sounds struggled up, and as she fell, the Maccabee leaped from the darkness, wrenched her from the grasp of her captor, and warding off attack with his knife, fled with her into the darkness.

The transfer of control over her had been made so swiftly that in her stupor of terror she hardly realized it. She was struggling silently and strongly in his hold, when he clasped her to him with a firmer impulsive embrace and whispered to her:

"Comfort thee, dear heart! It is I, Hesper!"

She ceased to resist so suddenly and was so tensely still that he knew the shock of immense reaction was having its way with her.

He knew without asking that she had been forced to leave the shelter of the Greek's roof, and though his rage threatened to rise up and blind him he was not entirely unaware of the benefit the inhospitality

of others had given him. At last she was with him; entirely in his care.

It was a safe shelter into which she was brought, but no luxurious one. There was light enough from the single torch stuck in a crevice in the ancient rock to show that it was habitable. The immense floor was packed hard by the trampling of many feet; overhead, lost in gloom, there must have been a rocky roof, but it was invisible. On the ledges of rocks were belongings by heaps and collections, showing that this was an abiding-place for great numbers. In the far shadows she distinguished long, silent, mummied windrows of men wrapped in blankets, sleeping. Huge gloomy piles of provisions filled up shadowy corners; about under the light was the litter left in the wake of human counsel; over all was the air of repose and occupancy that made a home out of the burrow.

Though the place held a great number of refugees, the footstep of the Maccabee wakened resounding emptiness. At the threshold he slackened his step and looked with pathetic anxiety at whatever light on Laodice's face would show her opinion of her refuge. But the uncertain torch revealed nothing and he led

her in and across to a solitary place where rugs from some looted house had been folded up for a pallet and spread about for carpets. She sat down and awaited his speech.

He motioned to the spacious barrenness about him.

"Canst thou content thyself in this place?" he asked, hesitating.

She nodded, but feeling that her reply had not shown all that words might, she lifted her face that he might see therein that which she could not trust her lips to say.

It was her undoing. Her weakness overwhelmed her and burying her face in the folds of her mantle, she wept.

After a dismayed silence, he bent over her and said with a quiver of distress in his voice:

"I — I have work, here, to do, but I shall take thee out of the city for better refuge — "

That she should seem to be grieving over the nature of the shelter given her, stirred her deeply. She half rose and with the light shining on her face, filled with gratitude in spite of her tears, took his hand in both of hers and pressed it with pathetic insistence.

He understood her.

He laid a hand unsteady with its tremor of delight and young eagerness upon the vitta and it slipped off her hair. As it dropped, the subtle warm fragrance of the heavy locks, now braided in maidenly style, reached him; the liveliness of her relaxed young figure communicated itself to him without his touch; all the invitation of her helplessness swept him to the very edge of abandoning his restraint. On his dark face a transformation occurred. All the hardness, even his years and his experience vanished from him and a soft recovering flush faintly colored his cheeks. In that sudden bloom of beauty in his face was stamped a realization of the far progress of his triumph. She was in his house and dependent on him, within the very reach of his arms.

When she looked up at him again, she read all this in his face, and instantly there returned to her, with warning intensity, the fear of her love of him. The last obstacle but her own conscience that stood between her and his perfect supremacy over her life had suddenly been swept away.

She started away from him, and put up her hands to ward off his touch.

"If you do that," she said in a tone sharp with distress, "it is sin and I shall be cursed! I shall have to go back to him!"

Then she had voluntarily left Julian, perhaps to seek him!

"You shall not go back to him!" he exclaimed. "After I have given up everything but my life to have you for myself!"

"You must not think of me in that way!" she commanded him vehemently. "I am a married woman! You shall remember that! If you forget it, I will go out into the streets and ask the Idumeans to kill me!"

"Nay, peace, peace! I shall do you no harm! You are frightened! I will do nothing that you would not have me do! Be comforted. Not any one in all the world has your happiness at heart so much as I. Believe me!"

"Believe *me!*" she insisted. "I am weary of doubt and denial. I am only safe if you recognize me as that which I claim to be. Answer me! You do believe I am the wife of Philadelphus?"

"I believed it, at once," he said frankly.

"Then — then —" but she flung her hands over

her face and slipped down on the rugs. For a moment he hesitated, restraining the impulse to break over the limits she had laid down for him.

Then he rose and, summoning one of the women who had taken refuge in the crypt, sent her to remain with the girl, and departed, shaken and uncertain, to his own place.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE SUNLESS CRYPT

The twilight of the cavern rarely revealed enough of the features of her fellows to Laodice for her to identify them or for them to identify her. She lived among them a dusky shadow among shadows. And because of her fear that Philadelphus might be searching for her, she stayed in the sunless crypt day by day until the Maccabee, noting with affectionate distress that she was growing white and weak, bade her take one of the women and venture up to the light.

There were, besides the women, two men who took no part in the preparation for war which went on about them in the cavern day and night. While weapons and armor were made and tramping ranks formed and broke before the commands of the lithe dark commander of that fortress and subdued but fierce councils took place around torches — while all

this went on, they kept back, even apart from the women, and said nothing.

Laodice saw that they were physically unfit; that one was very old and the other very feeble and her heart warmed again to that stern master who saw them fed as abundantly as his most valued men. These, then, were those Christians whom he had taken into his protection because of the Name which had inspired a shepherd boy to save his life.

When he commanded Laodice to go up into the sunlight, he approached the corner in which the two useless men hid and bade them, too, to go up into the air.

"Let us have no sickness in this place," he said bluntly and turned on his heel and left them to obey.

Laodice took one of the older women and timidly climbing the steps from which the rubbish had been pushed away by the climbing hundreds, went through the dusk of the passage that terminated in a brilliancy that dazzled her. And as she walked she heard the footsteps of the two men behind her.

Up in the chaos of fallen columns, she stood a moment with her hands pressed over her eyes. Only little by little was she able to permit the full

blaze of the Judean sun to reach them. The uproar on Jerusalem after the muffled silence of the underground cavern filled her with terror, and she pressed close to the shelter of the entrance until the woman at her side reassured her.

"It is nothing," the woman said, with a dreary patience. "It is as it was yesterday. I come here every day. I know."

After a while Laodice looked about her. The entrance to their refuge was about the middle of the ruin and therefore a great many paces back from the streets, so that she did not see Jerusalem's agonies face to face. But she saw enough to make her cold and to turn her shivering and panic-stricken into the darkness of the crypt below.

She saw the ascending streets of Zion and the tall fortifications mounting the heights within the city's limits. There she saw the flash of swords, swung afar off, spears brandished and the running hither and thither of defenders on the wall. Below she saw the remote constricted passages between rows of desolate houses, moving with people, sounding with clamor. There she saw combats, terrible scenes of frenzy, deaths and unnamable horrors; starvelings

gnawing their nails; shadows of infants pressed to hollow bosoms; old men too weak to walk that went on hands and knees; young men and young women in rags that failed to cover them, and wandering skeletons screaming, "Woe!"

Meanwhile huge stones mounted over the walls and fell within the city; three great towers planted beyond the walls, out of range of the Jewish engines and equipped with superior machines, were steadily devastating the entire quarter near which they were erected. Here two-thirds of the forces of Jerusalem were concentrated in a vain effort to resist the dire inroads of these effective engines. Here, the Maccabee and his Gibborim stood shoulder to shoulder with the Idumeans and fanatics of Simon and John, and here the half-mad defenders awakened at last to the fact that only divine interference could save the city against Rome.

In the south and the east conflagrations roared and crackled, where burning oil had been scattered over some remaining structures near the walls. When a great ram began its thunder somewhere near the Sheep Gate, there came a hollow booming noise of deafening volume from the charnel pits outside the

walls and a black cloud of incredible depth soared up into the skies.

Laodice, dumb with horror, looked at the prodigy without understanding, but the woman at her side shuddered.

"God help us!" she exclaimed. "They are vultures!"

Laodice turned to rush back into the cavern and so faced the two men who stood behind her.

One, at sight of her, shrank with a gasp, and, averting his shaggy head till the long white locks covered his face, fled back into the crypt.

The other was gazing with unseeing eyes across groaning Jerusalem.

"*I am the man,*" he was saying aloud, but to himself, "*that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.*"

The sight of him had a paralyzing effect upon Laodice. She saw, before her, Nathan, the Christian, who had buried her father, who had blessed her, who would know and could testify to a surety that she was the wife of Philadelphus!

She slipped by him without a sound and hurried down into the darkest corner of the cavern.

Circumstance had found her in her refuge and would drive her away from this sweet home back to that hateful house, to the man she did not love!

For many days, with increasing distress, Laodice avoided Nathan, the Christian. With that fascinated terror which at times forces human creatures to examine a peril, she felt irresistibly impelled to try his memory of events, that she might know if indeed he would recognize her.

Though she turned cold and flashed white when he came upon her one day in the darkness of their shelter, she felt nevertheless the relief of approaching a solution to her perplexity.

"They tell me," he said with the deliberate speech of the old, "that Titus is once more permitting citizens to depart from Jerusalem unharmed."

"Then," she said, grasping at this hope, "why do you stay here in this peril?"

"Why should I leave it? Even with the singers who wept by the waters of Babylon, I prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy. Except for the time when we of the Way were warned to depart, I have been in Jerusalem all my life. Then, though I had gone as far as Cæsarea on my way to Antioch to join the

brethren there, homesickness overtook me and I turned in my tracks, saying no man farewell, and came back."

"A weary journey for one so old," she said gently.

Would he remember also that it had been dangerous?

"Nay, but a journey full of works and reward. And I discovered at the end of it that I had lived in error forty years; that Christ never ceases to prove Himself."

Already the forbidden tenets of the Nazarene faith had entered into his words. But feeling somehow that her deflection from uprightness covered her whole life, there was no reason why she should not hear what these people believed and have done with it.

"Art thou a Christian?" she asked timidly.

"I am a believer in Christ, but whether I may call myself one of the blessed I do not know, for they have had faith. But I demanded a sign. Behold it! The ruin of the City of David!"

Her eyes widened with alarm.

"Is there no hope?" she exclaimed.

He looked at her, even in his old age impressed with the immense importance life and love must have

to so beautiful and beloved a woman. Presently he said, as if to himself:

"Yea, be thou blessed, O thou Redeemer, that givest life to them to whom life is dear and death approacheth."

Her concern for concealment vanished entirely in her rising terror for the future of the Holy City.

"I pray thee, Rabbi," she said in a low voice, drawing close to him, "tell me what thy people believe about the city. I have heard — but it can not be true!"

"Do not be troubled about the city," he answered. "Ask me rather how to become safeguarded against any disaster, greater even than the fall of cities."

"It is not for myself," she protested earnestly, "but for the world. Is there not a King to come to Israel?"

"There is, but not yet, my daughter. Of that day and hour no man knoweth. Now is Daniel's abomination of desolation; the generation passeth and the prophecy is fulfilled. Jerusalem is perishing."

Seeing the wave of panic sweep over her, he put out a soothing hand.

"Yet, do not fear. For such as you the Redeemer died; for your kind the Kingdom of Heaven is built, and the King whom the earth did not receive is for ever Lord of it."

The veiled reference to the tragedy which Philadelphus had recounted stood out with more prominence than the promise in his words.

"Whom the earth did not receive?" she repeated. "O prophet, as thou boasteth truthful lips and a hoary head, tell me what hath befallen us."

"Hear it not as a calamity," he said reassuringly. "Thou canst make it of all things the most profitable, if thou wilt. Forget the city. I, who would forget it but can not, bid thee do this. Behold, there is another Jerusalem which shall not fall. Look to that and be not afraid."

Her lips, parted to protest against the vague answer, closed at the final sentence and the Christian pressed his advantage.

"Of that Jerusalem there is no like on earth. Against its walls no enemy ever comes; neither warfare nor hunger nor thirst nor suffering nor death. This which David builded is a poor city, a humble city compared to that New Jerusalem. There the

King is already come; there the citizens are at peace and in love with one another. There thou shalt have all that thy heart yearneth after, and all that thy heart yearneth after shall be right."

In that city would it be right that she love Hesper instead of Philadelphus, and that she should have her lover instead of her lawful husband?

While she turned these things over in her mind, he wisely went on with his story. Shrewdly sensing the young woman's anxiety, the old Christian guessed the interest to her of the Messiah's history before His teaching and began with prophecy to support the authenticity of the wonderful Galilean's claim to divinity. It was no fisherman or weaver of tent-cloth who brought forth the declarations of the comforter of Hezekiah, the captive prophet and the priest in the land of the Chaldeans. His was no barbarous manner or slipshod tongue of the market-place and the wheat-fields, but the polish and the clean-cut flawless language of the synagogues and the colleges. Laodice saw in the gesture and phrase the refinement of her father, Costobarus, of the gentlest Judean blood.

"I saw Him," he went on in a low voice.

Laodice with her intent gaze on the beatified face put her hand to her heart.

"Forty years ago," the old voice continued, "I saw Him first in Galilee. There He was disbelieved and cast out. He came then unto Jerusalem and I saw Him there heal lepers, cast out evil spirits, cure the blind and the sick and the palsied. And in the house of Jairus and at Nain, I saw Him raise the dead.

"I saw Him come to Jerusalem. Multitudes followed Him and accompanied Him, casting their mantles and palm-branches in the way that His mule might tread upon them."

The old man pointed south toward the single summit from which Christ approaching could overlook Jerusalem.

"On that hill," he said, "while the multitudes hailed Him and the sound of Alleluia shook the air, He reined in His meek beast and looked upon this city, and wept over it. When He spoke, He said, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench*

"And there His enemies crucified Him."—*Page 369*

about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

"And three days later, I saw the Rock of David and all that multitude follow Him unto the Hill of the Skull and there His enemies crucified Him!"

After a paralyzed silence, Laodice whispered with frozen lips,

"In God's name, why?"

But he wisely did not pause with the calamity. He had the whole of the beginnings of Christianity to tell, a long narrative that contained as yet no dogma. Paul had seen the great light on the road to Damascus, and accepting apostleship to all the world had fought a good fight and had come unto his crown of righteousness; Peter had established the Church and had fed the sheep and had been offered up by the Beast who was Nero; John the Divine was seeing visions of the Apocalypse in the Island of Patmos; Herod Antipas, "that fox," had passed to his own place, prisoner and exile, sacrifice to a mad Cæsar's imaginings; Judas had hanged himself; Pilate had

drowned himself; thousands of the saints had died for the faith by fire and sword and wild beasts; kings had been converted and of the believers in Rome it was said, *Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*

Laodice sat with clasped hands, intent on each word as it fell from the lips of the aged teacher, seeing at one and the same time the Kingdom of Heaven constructed and her dream of an earthly empire falling.

"He said," the Christian continued, "*They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"

Repentance was a rite for Laodice, a payment of offering, a process to the righteously inclined, a thing that could in no wise purify the sinner as to make him worthy of association with the upright. The old Christian's use of the word was different; he had said that the Messiah came to the sinner, and not to the righteous. Had the young Jewess been less in need of comfort in her own consciousness of spiritual delinquency she would have set down the old teacher as one of the idlest dealers in contradic-

tion. But now she listened with keener zest; perchance in this doctrine there was balm for her hurt. She made some answer which showed the awakening of this new interest and then with infinite poetry and earnestness he began to unfold the teachings of Christ.

A woman came to them with wine and food, for the midday had come, but neither noticed it. In his fervor to enlighten this tender soul, the old man forgot his weariness; in her wonder at the strangely gentle doctrine which had contradicted all the world's previous usage, the girl forgot her prejudice. She listened; and with such signs as change of expression, flushes of emotion, movements of surprise and brightenings of interest to encourage him, the old Christian talked. When he had progressed sufficiently to round out the theory of Christianity, she had grasped a new standard. The contrast between the old and the new made itself instantly felt. On one hand was the simple and logical; on the other the complex and dogmatic. The Christian was able to measure proportionately how much should be laid upon her mind for study at once and while she still waited, he rose from his place.

"There is more; yet there are other days," he said.

But she caught his hand as he rose and with a sudden yearning in her eyes whispered:

"O Rabbi, what said He of love?"

"Love?" he repeated, with a softening about his lips. "The Master blessed love between man and woman."

"But, but —" she faltered, "if one love another than one's wedded spouse, then what?"

His face grew grave.

"That is not lawful even among you, who are still of the old faith."

"But suppose —"

He laid a kindly hand on the one that held his.

"Suffer but sin not. He that endureth unto the end shall be saved."

"What end?"

"Death."

She was silent while she gazed at him with change showing on her gradually paling face.

"Then — then what is in thy faith for the forlorn in love?" she exclaimed.

"Peace, and the consciousness of the joy of Christ in your steadfastness," he said.

She rose. How much longer had she to live?

"And thou sayest we die?"

"*Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,*" he said gently.

Fear Hesper, then, but not the Roman. While she stood in the immense debate of heart and conscience he laid a tender hand on her head.

"Perchance in His mercy thou shalt be welcomed there first by thy father, whom I buried, and by thy mother."

The sudden recurrence to that past tragedy and the unfolding of his recognition fairly swept Laodice off her feet with shock and alarm. If he noted her feeling, he was sorry he had not succeeded in comforting her with a promise of reunion with her beloved in that other land. He took away his tremulous hand from her hair.

Leaving her transfixed with all he had said, he moved painfully away, stiffened by long sitting while he discoursed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FALSE PROPHET

It was a different Amaryllis that the pretended Philadelphus faced now, from the one who had welcomed him on his arrival in Jerusalem months ago. Then she had been so cold and self-contained that it would have been effrontery to discuss her hopes with her. Now, with the avarice of love in her eyes, with wishfulness and defeat making their sorry signs on her face, she was a creature that even the humblest would have longed to help.

Philadelphus sat opposite her in the ivory chair which was hers by right. She sat in the exedra and listened eagerly to the things he said with her fingertips on her lips and her eyes gazing from under her brow as her head drooped.

She had ceased long ago to debate idly on the actual identity of the man who had called himself Hesper of Ephesus. There was another question that

absorbed her. Of late, it had been brought home to her that the charm of Laodice for the stranger from Ephesus, to whom the Greek knew the girl had fled, had been her purity. Why should it matter so much about virtue? she had asked herself. Why should it weigh so immeasurably more than the noble gifts of wit and beauty and strength and charm? Behold, she was wise enough to educate a barbarous nation, beautiful enough to bewitch potentates — for a time — strong enough to take a city; yet Hesper, who best of all could appreciate the value of these things, had turned from her to Laodice, who was merely chaste.

The greater part of the jealous and bitter passion that had shaken her then was dumb regret that the measure of charm was so irrational — and that she had not believed in it, in time, in time!

Now, however, since she had become convinced that Laodice had gone to Hesper for refuge, hope had awakened in her, but so filled with uncertainty and lack of confidence in another's weakness that it was little more than a torture to her.

If Laodice had gone to this winsome stranger, either claiming to be the wife of Philadelphus or ac-

knowledging the imposture, there was now no difference between Laodice and herself!

But, she asked herself, was it not possible that this lovely girl who had shown signs of illimitable fortitude, could live in the shelter of the captivating Hesper as uprightly as she had lived under the roof of the man she called her husband?

In one exigency, the hopes of Amaryllis budded; in the other, her intuitive belief in the strength of Laodice discouraged her. And while she alternately hoped and doubted, Philadelphus, in the chair opposite her, talked.

"It follows that you and I must work together to gain diverse ends. If our fortunes are to be tragic, we are undoing each other in this conjunction. Since I in all frankness prefer it to turn out comedy, let us make no error. Are you weary of John? Do you seek a new diversion?"

She looked at him, at first puzzled, then with a frown. It leaped to her lips, grown impatient with suffering, to tell him all that she had evolved of the histories of himself, his lady and of Hesper; but there seemed to be an element of recklessness in that

which threatened to do away with a means for her success. He did not wait for her answer.

"And I," he said with mock intensity, "am done to death with weariness — with my moneyer, this lady of mine. Let us be diverted while we live, for by the signs we shall all die soon."

"Where," he began when her mind wandered entirely from him, "dost thou think the mysterious man hath taken my other wife?

"I would I knew," he continued, conducting his inquiry alone. "It will be right simple to have her beauty spoiled in this hungry town, unless he takes tenderest care of her."

There was still no comment, but the lively sparkle in the Greek's eye showed that he had touched upon a jealous spot.

"And by the by," he pursued, "what does this stranger, whom I can not remember having known, look like? A villain?"

She answered now in a voice filled with rancor.

"Win away the girl from him and thou wilt know thyself to be the better man; but study how much he hath outstripped thee and thou shalt decide for

thyself, then, that he is handsomer, more winsome, stronger and more profitable. Describe him for thyself."

"Out upon you! How irritable misfortune makes most of us! Now, here is my lady. She would fail to see the humor in my fetching back this pretty impostor. Alas! Were I Deucalion or Pyrrha or whoever else it was that repeopled the world, I should have left jealousy out of the make-up of wives. It is a needless element. It gives them no pleasure, and Jove! how inconvenient it is for husbands! Now, I am not jealous of my wife. In fact, had any man the hardihood to supplant me, I should not discourage him; I should not, by my soul!"

"Why," she burst out again, irritated beyond control at his manner, "do you not leave this place?"

He swung his foot idly and smiled.

"I shall when I can take with me this dear pretty impostor who is so determined to have me," he answered lightly.

"Will you?" she asked eagerly. "Is that why you remain?"

"And for my lady's dowry. She keeps the key. But had I the girl cloaked and hooded for flight, I

might go, even without the treasure. The times are precarious, you observe."

She rose almost precipitately and hurried over to the swaying curtain of some heavy white material like samite, covering that which appeared to be a blind arch in the wall. She drew the hanging aside. It had hidden the black mouth of a tunnel, closed by a brass wicket which was locked.

"Here," she said rapidly, "is what strengthens John in his folly. This is a passage that leads under the Temple through Moriah into Tophet. The whole city is underlaid with these galleries, but this is the only one which leads to safety."

She dropped the curtain and approached him.

"But thou canst not go out of that passage alone!"

He smiled, and then with that boyish impulsiveness that he had cultivated to cover the evil in his nature, he thrust out his hand to her.

"Here is my hand on it!" he exclaimed.

"Go, then, and cease not till you have found her. Then, by any or all the gods, I shall see that you do not go out of that passage empty-handed."

He smiled at her radiantly and went at once to his chambers.

When he reached the apartments, he found them silent and deserted. He seized upon the opportunity as most propitious for a search for the possible hiding-place of the dowry of two hundred talents.

When he opened first the great press in which his lady kept her raiment he was confronted by emptiness. Dismayed, he turned to look into the room and found the chests for the most part open and rifled. On the brazier, now cold, lay a wax tablet. He snatched it up and read:

Received of Julian of Ephesus the appended salvage in good repair. Items: One wife, Two hundred talents.

JOHN, KING OF JERUSALEM.

He went back to the andronitis of Amaryllis.

"I have lost interest in the treasure," he said whimsically. "But I'll go out and look for the girl. I — I should like to discover of a truth if the passage leads out of Jerusalem."

Amaryllis closed her lips firmly. Philadelphus read in the look that he could not escape without Laodice.

Without further speech, he went to the vestibule, took his cloak and kerchief from the porter and went out into the city.

It was nearly midnight when he passed into the streets. The tumult of assault on the walls had ceased. The long lines of beacon-fires on the walls showed only a few men in arms posted there. Without there came no sound of activity in the camp of the Roman. The streets below, lighted up by the ever-burning beacons, showed its usual restless tramping of houseless, hungry ones. But there was no talk; each one who walked the passages went wrapped in his own dismal thoughts; the thousands took no notice of one another. Jerusalem was as silent as a city stricken with plague.

From the summit of Zion, which Philadelphus mounted, he could see three Roman war-towers, planted along the outer works, dimly lighted, and manned by a vigilant garrison of legionaries. These had been a dread and a destruction which the Jews had been unable to overthrow; coigns of vantage from which the enemy had been able to deal the sturdiest blows of the campaign. They had permitted no rest to the defenders on the wall; they had spread ruin by fire and carnage, by arrow and sling for days. Sorties against them had resulted in the death of their assailants, only. Jewish engines accomplished noth-

ing against them. The three, alone, were taking Jerusalem.

Philadelphus looked at their tall shapes, black against the remote illumination of the Roman camp, and inwardly hoped that they would hold off complete destruction of the city, until he had found the desirable woman.

No one noticed him; men passed him like shadows with their eyes ever on the ground; no one spoke; nothing disturbed the deadly quiet of the falling city.

But the next minute, Philadelphus, who walked alertly, saw people step out into gutters or press against walls, as if to allow some one to pass. Awakening interest ran abroad over the street ahead of him. A lane between the wandering multitude opened almost by magic. Through it, walking swiftly, his head up, his mystic eyes ignited, came Seraiah, soldier of Jehovah. There was no sound of his footfall. His garments flashed in the light of the beacons, but there was not even a whisper of their motion. But he had changed. There was fierce, superhuman intent in the despatch of his gait and in the uplift of his superb head. After him, as he

passed, ran whispers. Each one stopped and looked. He went down the uneven slope of Zion as some great shade borne on a swift air.

Two or three bold ones began to move after him. Others followed. The little nucleus grew. Philadelphus was caught in it. Numbers were added as courage grew with numbers. From intersecting streets people came. Some, although oppressed by the silence, asked what it was and were silenced quickly. Others began to mutter unintelligible predictions, and their neighbors shook their heads without understanding that which was said.

The news of Seraiah's mysterious progress communicated itself to rank and rank and spread abroad. Faces appeared against a background of lights at barred windows, along the balustrades of house-tops, from areas and ruins. Philadelphus, fascinated and astonished at this curious demonstration, was contented to pass with it. Silence, except for the rustling of garments and the multitudinous footfall, fell about the vicinity.

Ahead of them, Seraiah moved. His steps, finely balanced, passed over obstructions where most of his followers stumbled, and when he turned across Akra

and faced the Old Wall, the excitement became painful.

His pace was flying; many of his followers were running. It seemed that he was going against the Wall. Dozens anticipated that course and skirting through short ways clambered up on the fortifications and clung there though menaced by the sentries until Seraiah appeared.

At a narrow point in the street that ended against the wall, Seraiah met that Jew who had become a maniac on the day Jerusalem attacked Titus. Without warning the maniac leaped up into an intensely rigid posture; his legs spread, his lean arms upstretched at painful tension, his mouth wide, his eyes dilated immensely in their hollow depths.

Seraiah passed him as if no man stood in his way. Instantly the maniac wheeled, as a huge spread-eagle wind-vane on its staff, and stood at gaze, the broad uninterrupted light of the beacon shining down on him and the mysterious man. The street ended short of the wall. About the base of the fortification was an open space, in which was planted a scaling-ladder. Seraiah climbed this, an infinitesimal detail on the great blank of blackened stone.

Hundreds, rushing upon the wall, though a goodly distance from the point at which the strange man had mounted, climbed it and beat off the sentries.

And the foremost who reached the top saw the Roman Tower directly opposite Seraiah shudder suddenly and sink in a roaring cloud of dust upon itself to the earth.

Instantly the maniac below broke the tense silence with a scream that was heard in the paralyzed Roman camp:

"It is He, the Deliverer! Come!"

Of the thousands of Jews that heard the madman's cry, every heart credited it. Hundreds melted away suddenly, as if stricken with terror at what they might see; other hundreds scrambled down from their places to run purposelessly, crying aimless things to the night over the city; yet others covered their faces with their arms and fell in their places, expecting the end of the world; and of the rest, the less imaginative, the more composed and the more curious, remained on the walls to see enacted a further miracle. Uproar had broken out instantly among the four stolid legions of Titus on the Assyrian bivouac. Lights flashed out everywhere; great running to and fro

could be distinguished; rapid trumpet-calls and the prolonged roll of drums from company quarters to quarters were echoed back from Antonia and from Hippicus. The startled shouts of commanders; the nervous dropping of arms; the sharp excited response to roll-call; the sound of sentries challenging, the curt response by countersign, showed everywhere irregularities and the symptoms of panic in the immovable ranks of Titus.

Seraiah meanwhile had disappeared from his place as mysteriously as he had come.

Many of the Jews who remained on the wall believed that he had passed into the Roman camp and was troubling it. The fall of the tower, and the confusion it had wrought in the Roman camp, never occurred to them to have been fortuitous incidents with which Seraiah had nothing to do. Of the thousands that witnessed that miracle, most of them were convinced that the hour had come.

Meanwhile Jerusalem was roaring with excitement. The city was ready for a Messiah. Seraiah had arisen at the psychological moment. Earlier the Jews would have been too critical to accept him readily; later they would have reviled him for coming too

late. Whatever his advent lacked in thunders, in darkness, voices, and shaking of the earth, had been passed by his miraculous work against the Romans.

Philadelphus, who had seen the fall of the tower, and had dropped down from the wall as soon as he had explained it all to himself, came upon new disorders. Great concourses of awakened Jews were hurrying to the walls to see what had happened, or to behold the Roman army wiped out by the Angel of Death as the army of Sennacherib had perished. Others collected at the end of the Tyropean Bridge and watched the pinnacle of the Temple for the miracle which should restore the city. But the burned ruin where the Herodian palace had stood was the center of the most characteristic frenzy.

There thousands were congregated. A great bonfire had been kindled and above the multitude, on a colossal architrave fallen at one end from the giant columns that had supported it, stood a figure, redly illuminated by the fire, tiny as compared to the immense ruin of its high place, but Titan in its control over the wild mob below it.

It was a woman, a Jewess, dressed in faithful imitation of the archaic garb of the prophetesses, man-

tled with a storm of flying black hair, stripped of veil or cloak, and splendidly defiant of the restrictions laid upon woman long after the days of Deborah.

Over the heads of the panting multitude she shook a pair of arms that glistened for whiteness, and bewitched by the spell of their motion. From under her half-fallen lids shot gleams of fire that transfixed any upon whom they fell; from her supple body shaken at times with the power of its own dynamic force her hearers caught the grosser infection of physical excitement; they swayed with her as blown by the wind; they ceased to breathe in her periods; they groaned as the intensity of her fervor pressed upon them for response that they could not shape in words; they wept, they shouted, they prophesied, and over them swept ever the witchery of her wonderful voice, preaching impiety — the worship of Seraiah!

Philadelphus looked at this frantic work with a creeping chill. He knew the sorceress. Salome of Ephesus, who could send the sated theaters wild with her appeal to their senses, had found enchantment of a half-mad city not hard. Aside from the impiety, in fear of which his own irreligious spirit stood, he saw suddenly opened to him the immense scope of

her influence. Not Simon, not John, not Titus, had discovered the logical appeal to the city's unbalanced impulses. But the reckless woman, robing herself in the ancient garb of the days to which the citizens would revert, assuming the pose of a woman they had sanctified, preaching the dogma they would hear, showing them the sign that helped them most, held Jerusalem, at least for that hour, in her hands.

He realized at once that to attempt to denounce her would expose him to destruction at the wolfish hands of the frenzied mob. There were not soldiers enough in the city to destroy her influence, for she had achieved in her followers that infatuation that goes down to death before it relinquishes its conviction. Her control was complete. Seraiah was the anointed one, but the prophetess, the instigator, the founder of the worship, as follows in all apostasies, was the final recipient of the benefits of that devotion.

Philadelphus walked away from the sight of Salome's triumph. He had surrendered instantly his hope of regaining the treasure. The whole of mad Jerusalem had ranged itself with her to protect it. And Laodice was not yet found.

CHAPTER XX

AS THE FOAM UPON WATER

The madness on Jerusalem poured like an overwhelming flood into the cavern under the ruin of the Herodian palaces. There was Hesper, with most of his Gibborim gathered, preparing to proceed to the defense of the First Wall in Akra against which the Roman would hurl himself in the morning.

For days he had controlled his men only by the force of his fierce will. Restlessness, little short of turbulence, had changed his six hundred from earnest recruits to bright-eyed, contentious, irresponsible enthusiasts whom only intimidation could manage. They seemed to be balanced, prepared, ready at the least whisper in the wind to scatter madly, each in his own direction, after a vagary, albeit the end were destruction.

Throughout these latter days the Maccabee had become strained and unnatural in his manner. There

was a vehemence in all he did which seemed to be a final resolution against despair. His decisions were arbitrary; his methods extreme. Laodice, sensing something climacteric in his atmosphere, kept aloof from him, and regarded him from the dusk of her corner with wonder and a pity that she could not explain. The Christian on the other hand seemed always in an unobtrusive way to be at the Maccabee's elbow. The apparition with the long white hair, however, ran away and was found on the streets by the Christian and brought back to the cavern, where he hid in a dark shadow in the remote end of the crypt and was not seen.

Of late the cavern was always full of suppressed excitement; unpremeditated conferences among the Gibborim, which Hesper harshly forbade; and general sharp resentment against imposed regulations and military drill. On several occasions the six hundred were sent in defense of the walls only by sheer force of their leader's will-power. And there they fell in at once with the irregular methods of the Idumeans and fanatics that fought each after his own liking, and the careful instruction of the Maccabee was disregarded. Only so long as he cowed them,

they obeyed him; and he seemed to feel, as they seemed to indicate, that when that thing happened which all Jerusalem indefinitely expected and could not name, his control over them would be lost beyond restoration.

On the night of the fall of the Roman tower, the Maccabee's forces had been withdrawn for rest to their retreat and at midnight were formed again for return to the fortifications.

By the strange inscrutable spread of rumor, sweeping with the air, the tidings of the miracle and the rise of Seraiah poured in upon the restive hundreds that the Maccabee was attempting to form in his fortress. It came like the gradual velocity of a burning star across the sky. From the ranks nearest the exit from the burrow the murmur issued, growing into intelligible sound, mounting to the wildness of hysteria and prevailing wholly over the Gibborim in the space between heart-beats. Everywhere they cast down their spears and their weapons, everywhere they gazed at him with brilliant threatening eyes and cried in loud voices so that the things each mad mind put into expression were lost in a great unintelligible raving.

Laodice, the Christian and that white-haired trembler in his refuge, saw the Maccabee raise himself to his full height and lifting his sword confront in one grand effort at command a mob of six hundred madmen!

Perhaps that manifestation of iron courage and strength, which the crazy lot somehow realized, saved him from death. Instead of falling upon him they turned away from the scene of the last vain effort for their own salvation and rushed, trampling one another, into the mad city of Jerusalem.

From without, the hoarse uproar of their desertion was heard to merge with the great tumult over the Holy City. Tense silence fell in the crypt.

The light of the torch wavered up and down the tall figure of the Maccabee as he stood transfixed in the attitude of command that had achieved nothing. It seemed the final inclination beyond the perpendicular that precedes the fall. The Christian started from his place and hurried toward the tense figure in the torch-light. Laodice, unconscious of what she did, approached him with an agony of distress for him written in her face. The white-haired apparition crept out a little way on his knees and putting

aside his tangled locks gazed with burning eyes at the defeated man.

Laodice, in her anxiety, moved into the range of the Maccabee's vision. The next instant he had thrown away his sword and had caught her in a crushing embrace to him. His voice, blunted and repressed as if something had him by the throat, was stunning her ear.

"And thou!" he was saying. "What from thee, now? Hate! Curses! Ingratitude! Hast thou poison for me, or a knife? Or worse, yet, scorn? Speak! It is a day of enlightenment! I'll brook anything but deceit!"

She stopped him in the midst of his vehement despair, by laying her hands on his hair. There surged to her lips all the eloquence of her love and sympathy, but beside her old Nathan stood — an embodiment of her conscience, watching.

Twice she essayed to put into words the comfort of her submission to his love. Twice her lips failed her; but the third time she turned to the Christian.

"Rabbi, what shall I do?" she implored. "Tell me out of thy wisdom!"

"What is it?" he asked, feeling that there was more than sympathy for the defeated man in her heart.

"What would thy Christ have me to do?" she insisted. "This stranger, here, is the joy of my heart; I am like to die if I can not give him the love that I feel for him this hour!"

The startled Christian looked at her with suspicion growing in his eyes.

"Art thou a wife? Wedded to another than this man?" he asked gravely.

"Wedded," she whispered, "to one who hath denied me, affronted me and cast me out of his house! In this man I have found favor from the beginning. He has been tender of me, he has sheltered me, and he has strengthened me against himself to this hour. There has been nothing sinful between us!"

The old Christian's face grew immeasurably sad.

"There is but one thing for you to do," he said.

She wrenched herself away from the Maccabee, who had been angrily protesting against her carrying his case to another for decision, and confronted Nathan.

"But he rejected me!" she cried with earnestness. "That alone is enough among our people for divorcement!"

The Christian shook his head sadly. He was not happy to lay down this prohibition before them who suffered.

"There is no help in thy faith for such as I am. In that thy religion fails!" she cried.

"Love, now, is all in all to thee, daughter. It is but the speech of thy young blood running through thy veins, the claim of thy youth to thy use upon earth. Resist it; for when thy years are as many as mine thou wilt lose thy rebellious spirit and the fervor will have died out of thy heart. Then, if thou hast fallen in this hour, how vain and worthless it will seem to thee! Divine fires in the heart of men never become changed in value. Love purely and thou wilt never repent; but I say unto thee thou fashionest for thyself humbled and shamed old age if thou transgressest the Law!"

"What mercy, then, since thou preachest mercy, in filling me with this weakness if my life must be darkened resisting it, and my future show no relief for it?" she insisted passionately.

It was the cry old as the world. He looked at her sadly, hopelessly.

"As for God, His way is perfect," he said. "*How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* Thou shalt struggle with the truth, my daughter, but without fail and most readily thou shalt know when thou hast sinned!"

She was past the influence of argument. Impulse controlled her now entirely. She would see if there were not an intelligence, even a religion which would see her sorrow from her own heart's position.

She listened now to the words of her lover.

"He is an exclaimer, a prophet of doom!" he was crying. "Love me and let us die!"

Without in the entrance of the crypt some great-lunged fanatic was calling the multitude to harken to the prophetess.

The Maccabee's lips were against her cheek as he continued to speak.

"It is the end! There is no help for us. Love me, and let me be happy an hour before we perish! The Nazarene is right! The city is cursed! God's wrath is upon us. The hour is still ours. Love me and let us die!"

Without the great voice, like an unwearying bell, was calling:

"A sign! A sign! Behold the Deliverer! Come all ye who would share his triumph and hear! Hear! Come ye and be fed, ye hungry; be drunken, ye thirsty; love and be loved, ye forlorn!"

Laodice stiffened in the Maccabee's clasp.

"Dost thou hear?" she whispered. "It may be true!"

He shook his head that he had bowed upon her shoulder.

"Let us go," she urged. "Perchance he has comfort for us. Come, Hesper; let us see what he has for the forlorn."

"Who?" he asked dully.

"They say the Deliverer has come."

He shook his head again, but with her two hands she lifted his face from its refuge, and urging with her eyes and her hands and her lips she led him toward the stairs. The Christian looked after them.

"*For there shall arise false Christs; and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect*," he said sorrowfully.

The horror of the city augmented hour by hour. The Jerusalem Laodice looked upon now was infinitely more afflicted than the one she had seen in the daylight days before.

The walls were now outlined by fire which illuminated all the city that lay directly beneath the beacons. To the north gnomish outlines by hundreds against the flames showed where the soldiers of the factionists were placing the topmost stones upon an inner wall or curtain erected just within the Old Wall, which was by this time shaking and cracking under the assaults of a great siege-engine without. Titus, awakened by the fall of his tower, had immediately renewed the attack, although the morning was still some hours distant.

But the citizens were no longer disinterested, no longer wrapped in hopelessness and dull misery.

Hungry, sleepless, houseless, diseased and mad though they were, their hollow eyes gleamed now with hope that was almost defiant. Around the Maccabee and Laodice roared the comment of the multitude.

"They say he climbed to the summit of the outer wall overlooking Tophet and remains there a target

for the Roman arrows, which rebound from him!" cried one.

"One of John's men says that the heads of the arrows are blunted and the most of them snapped in two when they are picked up."

"The Romans have ceased to shoot at him!"

"They say that his footprints in the dust on the Tyropean Bridge are Hebrew letters writing 'Elia' in gold!"

"It is said that the inner Temple is rocking with trumpet blasts and that John is struck dead!"

"They say that those who believe in him shall ask for whatever they would have and have it!"

"The breaches in the First Wall have been healed; the old rock is back in its place!"

"They say that the dead beyond the wall in Tophet are prophesying!"

"There is a bolt of lightning fixed in the sky over Titus' camp. We are called to go forth and see it fall!"

A voice swept by distantly crying that a woman had eaten her child. Crazed Posthumus, self-elected guardian of the Law, with the sacred roll under his

arm, declaimed, without any of his audience attending, that prophecy which this horror fulfilled.

All Jerusalem was in the streets; all Jerusalem poured into the immense open space where some palatial ruin stood, and melted in the giant concourse that gathered to hear the prophetess.

Laodice and the Maccabee were unable to see the woman; only her voice, mystic, musical, pitched at a singing monotone, intoning rather than speaking, reached them from the distance. The long harangue, delivered as a chant, had long ago had a mesmerizing effect on her audience. Absolutely she controlled them; along the dead level of her preaching they maintained a low continuous murmur, accompanied by a slight slow swaying of the body; in the climaxes of the appeal they responded with cries and wild gestures, flinging themselves about in attitudes characteristic of their frenzy. In their faces was the reflection of a peculiar light that proved that derangement had settled over Jerusalem. It was the end of the reign of reason.

"It is the abomination of desolation. Even so, it is finished! It is the time, it is full time, and

Michael hath come. There are seventy weeks; behold them. The transgression is finished and the end hereto of all sins. Approacheth the hour for the reconciliation for iniquity and to bring in everlasting righteousness and to seal up the vision and prophecy and to anoint the most Holy! Prepare ye!"

Somewhere in the city a voice that was heard even by the fighting-men on the wall in Akra cried:

"The Sacrifice has failed! The Oblation is ceased! There is no Offering for the Altar; none is left to offer it!"

The vast gathering heard it, and immediately from the high place of the prophetess came back the words, prompt and effective:

"*And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease!*"

Posthumus, buried in the midst of the crowd, was shouting, but over him the splendid mesmerism of the prophetess' voice soared.

"*The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children; they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people. . . . The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O*

daughter of Zion; . . . and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate!"

Among the crowd now growing frantic, people began to cry:

"A sign! A sign!"

Others shouted:

"Lead us!"

"Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the Heaven of the Lord!"

"Lead us!" they still shouted.

They were hungry; they had been abstinent; they had surrendered their riches and their comforts. It was not independence but necessities that they wanted now. The primal wants were at the surface.

"Come up and be filled!" she cried. "Ask and it shall be given unto you! Eat of the grapes and the honey; drink of wine and warm milk; sleep as kings; be housed in mansions; be rulers; command potentates! Let kings bow at your footstools! Be replenished; be great! Suffering hath been your portion since the earth was; but the end is come. Draw nigh and have your recompense. Laugh, you

whose eyes have trickled down with the waters of affliction! You in the low dungeon come forth and range all the free boundaries of the world. Whosoever hath gravel between his teeth, let them be grapes! He who sitteth alone, gather company and revel unto him! Feast, ye hungry; be drunken, ye thirsty; love and be loved, ye forlorn!"

Laodice leaned forward suddenly and hung on the woman's words.

"The time for sacrifice and humiliation is paid out! It was a long time! Now, behold in the generosity of his repentance, ye shall ask and nothing shall be denied. Speak! Ask! The whole world, Heaven and earth and the delights of all the years are yours, now and for all time!"

At Laodice's side was Amaryllis. The Greek's face was pale but lighted with a certain enlightenment that was almost threatening.

Startled and frightened Laodice moved back from the Greek, who moved with her, without a glance at the Maccabee.

The voice of the prophetess swept on:

"Ye have bowed to tyrants and bent your necks to murderers; ye have waged wars for pillagers and

shared not in the spoils. Why are ye hungry now? Who is full-fed in these days of want, yourselves or your masters? A sword, a sword is drawn; uphold the arm that wields it!"

"Sedition!" Amaryllis whispered, as the mob began to murmur and stir at this new doctrine.

"For behold, he shall go forth with great fury to destroy and utterly to make away many!"

Amaryllis bent so she could whisper in Laodice's ear.

"John hath taken him a new woman to keep him cheerful this hour. I was not daring enough. Philadelphus' wife hath supplanted me. Your place with him is vacant. Go back and possess it!"

"Why was appetite and desire and thirst of power and the love of riches lighted in you, but to be satisfied?" The prophetess' words swept in after Laodice's sudden fear of returning to Philadelphus. "We have expiated the sin of Adam, the greed of Jacob and the fault of David. The judgment is run out; ye have come to your own! Verily, I say unto you, if ye follow me in the name of him who hath come unto you, the world shall be yours!"

Amaryllis still continued to whisper, and Laodice,

fearing that the Maccabee might hear, drew farther away. He stood where she had left him, with his head lowered, waiting — at last a creature dependent on another's will.

"Listen!" Amaryllis said. "I have been seeking you since midnight! Philadelphus' doubt was awakened in this woman. He questioned her, so minutely that she betrayed ignorance of many things she should have known had she been the real daughter of Costobarus. And when finally he taxed her with imposture, she robbed him of the dowry and fled to John. Convinced that you are his wife, he set forth and hath since searched for you without ceasing! See, over there! He seeks you, now!"

Laodice looked the way the Greek pointed and saw Philadelphus, standing with lifted head and stretched to his full height, as if searching over the crowd for her.

Panic seized her. She wrenched herself from the Greek's hold and, forgetting even the protection of Hesper who was within touch of her, she threw herself into the crowd behind her and struggled out of the press.

Nathan, the Christian, saw her turn and followed instantly in the path she made.

Once out, she turned in a bewildered manner this way and that. What refuge, now, for her, indeed, but the cavern under the ruin and the care of Hesper, until the end which should swallow them all!

A trembling hand was laid on her arm.

She whirled, expecting to find Philadelphus. Beside her, his old face radiant with emotion, stood Momus!

CHAPTER XXI

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT

Within the Roman lines was a bent and deformed figure of an old waif that the soldiers had picked up attempting to run the lines into Jerusalem the second day after the siege had been laid about the Holy City.

The old man, though wrinkled and twisted and bowed, had fought with such terrible savagery and had incontinently laid in the dust in succession three of the camp's best fighting-men, that the Roman soldiers, for ever partizan to the strong man, had finally with great difficulty succeeded in trussing the old belligerent and had brought him before Titus.

There they laid the twisted old burden before the young general and shamelessly told how he, thrice the age of the vanquished men, had finished them with despatch.

It was evident that the old man was a Jew; it

became also apparent that he was dumb and partly deaf, and further to their amazement and admiration, they discovered that his right leg and arm were too stiff for ordinary use and that he had done his wonderful execution with terrific left limbs.

This saved his life and gave him a partial liberty. Titus, however, admitted to Carus that the old man's distress at being kept out of Jerusalem was pitiable enough to urge the young general to deport him and get him out of sight.

For it was manifest that the old minotaur was in deep trouble. But his paralyzed tongue would not serve him, and his menial ignorance had not provided him with the means of telling his desire by writing. Titus was unable to understand from his signs anything further than that he wished to get into the city. The young general in one of his outbursts of generosity would have permitted this, but that Nicanor happened in at an evil moment and drew such pictures of calamitous effect in passing the old servant into Jerusalem that Titus was forced reluctantly and irritably to be convinced of the folly of his kindness. So here, through the terrible days of the siege, old Momus at times desperate and savage, at others piteously sup-

pliant, wore on the sentries' peace of mind and stood like a shadow, for ever watching the white walls of the besieged city.

The Romans were now within the city. Only Zion and the Temple held against them. A wall built with the thoroughness of David, the ancient, and solidified by the mortising of Time, ran directly from Hippicus to the Tyropean Valley, joining the tremendous fortifications of Moriah and so cut off Zion from the advance of the army. Securely intrenched within that quarter and the Temple, Simon and John began the last resistance which should tax Roman endurance and Roman patience as it had not been taxed before.

Titus no longer lagged. Famine had long since become a powerful ally and the honor of the Flavian house rested upon his immediate subjugation of the rebellious city. He no longer expected capitulation; yet he did not neglect to be prepared for it and to encourage it. Though the heart of the historian Josephus broke, he did not fail to serve his patron as mediator, though without hope. Titus himself, as from time to time the horror of his work impressed itself upon him, made overtures to the factionists, neglecting no art or inducement which should con-

vince the seditious that their resistance was foolhardy, even mad. At such times, Nicanor's face became contemptuous and Carus himself frowned at the young general's attitude. But the spirit of a Roman and the traditions of a soldier even could not prevent the young man from weakening at times before the charnel pit in Tophet where countless thousands of vultures fattened with roaring of wings and hissing of combat.

But under an ever-thickening veil of horrid airs, the struggle went on.

The Roman Ides of July arrived.

Titus had erected banks upon which his engines were raised to batter the walls of the Temple.

From Titus' camp, the Romans on sick leave, the commissaries, those attached to the army who were not fighting-men, and old Momus, saw first, before the attack on the Temple began, a soft increasing dun-colored vapor rise between the Temple and Antonia. It issued from the cloister at the northwest which joined the Roman tower. As they watched, they saw that vapor grow into a pale but intensely luminous smoke, as if fine woods and burning metals were consumed together. In a moment the whole north-

west section was embraced in a sublime pall of fire.

John was burning away the connection between the Temple and the tower and was making the sacred edifice four-square.

As soon as it became confirmed, in the minds of the watchers in the Roman camp, that the Temple had been fired, the old mute among them seemed to become wholly unbalanced. Without warning, he leaped upon the nearest sentry who, not expecting the attack, went down with a clatter of armor and a shout of astonishment. The next instant the old man was making across the intervening space between the camp and Jerusalem as fast as his stiff legs could carry him.

The purple sentry sprang to his feet and strung an arrow, but before he could send it singing, the old minotaur was mixed with a second soldier in such confusion that the first sentry hesitated to shoot lest he should kill his fellow. Another moment and a second soldier was struggling in the impediment of his armor in the dust and the old mute was again hobbling straight away toward the walls of Jerusalem. He was now a fair mark for the first sentry, but that Roman's rancor died after he had seen his own dis-

grace covered by the overthrow of his fellow. Two of Titus' scouts next stood in the path of the running old man. One went to the ground so suddenly and so violently that the watchers, now breaking into howls of delight, knew that he had been tripped. The other stood but a moment longer, than he, too, rolled into the dust.

The old man might have gone no farther at this juncture, for at every latest triumph he left a crimson soldier murderous with shame. But before the arrow next strung to overtake him could fly, Titus, Carus and Nicanor, accompanied by their escort, rode between the fugitive and the men he had defeated.

"There goes our minotaur," Carus said quietly. Titus drew up his horse and looked. Nicanor with a sidelong glance awaited the young Roman's command to his escort to ride down the fugitive. But he waited, and continued to wait, while Titus with lifted head and with indecision in his eyes watched the deformed old shape hobble on toward the Wall of Circumvallation.

"Shall we let him go?" Nicanor inquired coldly.

"If some of my legionaries or those erratic Jews fail to get him between here and Jerusalem, he shall

get into Jerusalem. But by Hector, he will earn his entry!"

They saw the old man mount by the causeway of earth which the Romans had built over the siege wall for the passage of the troops, saw him an instant outlined against the sky on the summit, and the next instant he disappeared.

Titus touched his horse and rode at a trot toward the causeway himself. He would see the end of this mad venture.

In the hour of sunrise the sentinel above the North Gate in the Old Wall saw among the ruins of the houses of Coenopolis a figure dodging painfully hither and thither. It was not habited in the brasses of the Roman armor. Also, it hobbled as if lame and ran toward the gate fast closed below the sentry.

The Jew, too intensely interested in the great climax enacting in the city below, ceased to remark on this figure.

Presently, however, he looked again into ruined Coenopolis. He saw there this un-uniformed figure wrapped in fierce embrace with a young legionary. Almost before the sentry's astonishment shaped itself

into exclamation, the legionary was tumbled aside as if crushed and the old figure hobbled on.

Suddenly there appeared in the path of the wayfarer a galloping horseman, who drew his mount back on his haunches, then spurred him to ride down the old man.

The sentry on the Old Wall made a choked sound, unslung his bow and sent an arrow singing. There was a shout and the figure of the horseman plunged from his saddle face down on the earth.

The wayfarer flung himself away and rushed toward the wall, only a little distance away.

But all Coenopolis seemed to swarm now with legionaries, afoot or horseback.

The Jewish sentry rushed to the edge of the tower overhanging the gate.

"Open!" he shouted below. "One cometh!"

With a rattle and clang of falling bars and chains the gate of the Old Wall swung.

Disregarding the known wishes of Titus, two of the legionaries simultaneously let fly their javelins. But the mute, hobbling uncertainly, was not a steady mark and under the whistle of arrows re-

ceived and sent, he blundered up the causeway leading to the Gate of the Old Wall, and the portal slowly and ponderously closed behind him.

Wild howls of derision and exultation went up from the Jews. Many of the soldiers clambered down to satisfy their curiosity about the latest addition to the starving garrison. But he proved to be a deformed old man, mute and weary, who was distressed for fear he would be detained by them and who hobbled out into the besieged city and posted as fast as his legs could carry him toward the house of Amaryllis, the Seleucid.

But at the edge of a great open space where the Herodian palaces had stood he came upon a concourse which seemed to be all Jerusalem. It was a gaunt horde, shouting, raging, prophesying and drowning the roar of battle at the Temple fortifications with the sound of religious frenzy.

Momus, fresh from the orderly camp of Titus, was struck with terror. He would have retreated and followed some side street toward his destination, when he caught sight of a girl on the very outskirts of this mob. Momus laid a trembling hand on her arm. She threw up her head with a start.

CHAPTER XXII

VANISHED HOPES

The tremulous old man, weakened from his long and superhuman struggle to enter the doomed city, held Laodice to his breast while she stroked his rough cheeks and murmured things that he did not hear and which she did not realize in the rush of her helplessness and dismay.

At the corner of Moriah and the Old Wall, the tumult was infernal. Out of the suffocating sallow smoke from the tuns of burning tar heaved over the fortification upon the engines and their managers, the stones from the catapults soared into view and fell upon the sun-colored marbles that paved the Court of the Gentiles. Clouded by the vapor, targets for the immense missiles, the Jews heaving and writhing in personal encounters appeared black and inhuman. Every combatant shouted; the great stones screamed; the boiling pitch hissed and roared, and

the thunder of the conflict shook the Temple to its very foundations.

Without, the Romans planted scaling ladders, mounted them and were pitched backward into the moat regularly. Regularly, the ladders were set up again after struggle, mounted without hesitation and thrown down again, with an inevitability which furnished a grim travesty to the struggle. The two remaining towers were set in position against the base of Moriah and resumed execution. One after another the engines of the Romans were hauled into position, and worked unceasingly until covered with burning oil from the battlements above and consumed. Others were hauled into place; fresh detachments of Romans seized upon the scaling-ladders or mounted to the towers, and the roar of the conflict never abated.

Meanwhile on the slopes of Zion the whole of Jerusalem, gaunt, dying and demoniacal, was packed in the ruins of the palace of Herod.

Old Momus with triumph and tearful exultation was holding out to Laodice a heavy roll of writings, dangling important seals, ancient papers showing

yellow beside the fresh parchment, and an old record dark with long handling.

Here were the proofs of her identity!

Laodice shrank from him with a gasp that was almost a cry. Behold, the faithful old servant had suffered she knew not what to bring such evidence as would force her to do that which she believed she could not do and survive!

Momus sought to put the papers in her hands, but she thrust them away and he stood looking at her in amazement and sorrow.

Nathan, the Christian, stood close to her. From the opposite side, Philadelphus rounded the outskirts of the mob, searching. He did not see her. She flung herself between Momus and Nathan and cowered down until Philadelphus had passed from sight. When she lifted her head, Momus was gazing at her with the light of shocked comprehension growing in his eyes. Nathan, the Christian, touched her.

"Who was that man?" he asked gravely.

She rose and laid her hands on the Christian's shoulders.

"My husband," she said.

Something had happened at the Temple. She saw the Jews at the wall recoil from the dust of battle, rally, plunge in and disappear. From out that presently shone now and again, then with increasing frequency and finally in great numbers, the brass mail of Roman legionaries. Titus' forces had scaled the wall.

From her position, she saw running toward them John of Gischala, with his long garments whipping about him, wrapping his tall figure in live cerements. He was disarmed and bleeding. She saw next Amaryllis, with compassionate uplifted hands stop in his way; saw next the Gischalan thrust her aside with a blow and the next instant disappear as if the earth had swallowed him.

Nathan was speaking to her.

"How often, O my daughter, we recognize truth and deny it because it does not give us our way! God put a sense of the right in us. We transgress it oftener than we mistake it!"

The roar of the turning battle and the mob about her drowned his next words, except,

"You can not be happy in iniquity; neither blessed; but you are sure to be afraid. Right has

its own terror, but there is at least courage in being right, against your desires."

He was talking continuously, but only at times did the wind from the uproar sweep his fervent words to her.

"Christ had His own conflict with Himself. What had become of us had He listened to the tempter in the wilderness, or failed to accept the cup in the Garden of Gethsemane! How much we have the happiness of Christ in our hands! Alas! that His should be a sorrowful countenance in Heaven!

"The love of a man for a woman was near to the Master's heart! How can you feel that you must love and be loved in spite of Him! Pity yourself all you may you can not then be pitied so much as He pities you!

"Love as long and as wilfully as you will, and then it is only a little space. The time of the supremacy of Christ cometh surely, and that is all eternity! Which will you do — please yourself for an hour, or be pleased by the will of God through all time? Love is in the hands of the Lord; you can not consign it longer than the little span of your life to the hands of the devil."

Momus, in whose mind had passed an immense surmise, was again at her side.

"O daughter of a noble father," his dumb gaze said, "wilt thou put away that virtue which was born in thee and let my labor come to naught?"

But the preaching of Nathan and the reproach of Momus were feeble, compared to the great tumult that went on in her soul. She had seen John of Gischala cast Amaryllis aside. Even the Greek's sympathy was hateful to him. Yet when Laodice had first entered the house of Amaryllis, the woman had been obliged to dismiss John from her presence for his own welfare and the welfare of the city. Why this change?

Amaryllis was no less beautiful, no less brilliant, no less attractive than she had once been; but the Gischalan had wearied of her.

Laodice recalled that she had not been surprised to see the man throw Amaryllis aside. It seemed to be the logical outcome of love such as theirs. How, then, was she to escape that which no other woman escaped who loved without law? In the soul of that stranger who had called himself Hesper, were lofty ideals, which had not been the least charm

which had attracted her to him. Was she, then, to dislodge these holy convictions, to take her place in his heart as one falling short of them, or were they still to exist as standards which he loved and which she could not reach? In either event, how long would he love — what was the length of her probation before she, too, would encounter the inevitable weariness?

It occurred to her, then, how nearly the natural law of such love paralleled the religious prohibition that the Christian had shown to her. However harsh and unjust the sentence seemed, it was rational. With her own eyes she had seen its predictions borne out. Already the relief of the sorrowing righteous possessed her. She turned to the Christian.

"Take me to my husband," she said. "Now! While I have strength."

Momus caught the old Christian by the arm and, signing eagerly that he would lead, hurried away in advance of the two down into the ravine and crossed to the house of Amaryllis.

There were no soldiers to stop them about the house. When no response was made to her knock, Laodice opened the door and passed in.

Her old conductors followed her.

Amaryllis sat in her ivory chair; opposite her in the exedra was Philadelphus. At sight of him, the last of the soft color went out of Laodice's face. A curve of despair marked the corners of her mouth and she seemed to grow old before those that looked at her.

Philadelphus and the Greek sprang to their feet, the instant the group entered.

Laodice waited for no preliminary. Amaryllis' design was patent to her; it was part of her sorrow that now Hesper would be free to the devices of this deceitful woman. So she did not look at the Greek. She addressed Philadelphus in a voice from which all hope and vivacity had gone.

"I have brought proofs. Behold them!"

Nathan, the Christian, stood forth.

"I, Nathan of Jerusalem, met and talked with this Laodice, daughter of Costobarus, in company with Aquila, the Ephesian, three men-servants in all the panoply and state of a coming princess three leagues out of Ascalon, her native city. I buried by the roadside her father, who died of pestilence on their

journey hither. I bear witness that she is the daughter of Costobarus and thy wedded wife."

A great light sprang into the face of the Greek. Philadelphus, nervous, albeit the news he heard filled him with pleasure, stood and waited.

The Christian stepped back and Momus, bowing, approached and handed the leather roll into the none too steady hands of the Ephesian. He opened it and drew forth parchments.

Aloud he read a minute description of Laodice from the rabbi of the synagogue in Ascalon; under the great seals of the Roman state, he found and read the oath of the prefect, that such a maiden as the rabbi had described had been married before him to Philadelphus Maccabaeus fourteen years before. Then followed the depositions of forty Jews and Gentiles who were nurses, tradesmen and other people like to have daily contact with the young woman in her house, setting entirely at naught any claim that Laodice was other than the wife who had been supplanted by an adventuress. Philadelphus did not read them all. Before he made an end he dropped the documents and flung wide his arms. But Laodice

with a countenance frozen with suffering held him off for a moment.

"Go," she said to the old Christian, "unto Hesper and lead him into the belief of the Lord Jesus Christ which is mine."

The old Christian approached the fountain in the center of the andronitis and taking up water in his palm sprinkled a few drops on her hair while she knelt.

"In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, I baptize thee, Laodice. Amen!"

While she knelt, he said:

"I shall search for him also. Christ have mercy on thee now and for ever. Farewell."

He was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FULFILMENT

When Nathan, the Christian, stepped into the streets once more there was an immense accession of tumult about him.

He turned to look toward the corner of the Old Wall in time to behold Jews in armor and Romans in blazing brass rush together in a great cloud of dust as the Old Wall went in and Titus swept down upon Jerusalem.

At the same instant from the ruined high place upon Zion came a roar of stupendous menace. The Christian, with sublime indifference to danger, kept his path toward the concourse from which he had taken Laodice. As he ascended the opposite slope of the ravine, he saw, descending toward the battle, the front of a rushing multitude, as irresistible and as destructive as a great sea in a storm.

He saw that the mob was turning toward Akra,

and to avoid it, the Christian climbed up to the Tyropean Bridge, and from that point viewed the whole of Jerusalem sweeping down upon the heathen.

At the head of the inundation passed a melodious voice crying:

"An end, an end is come upon the four corners of the land! Draw near every man with his destroying weapon in his hands for the glory of the Lord! For His house is filled with cloud and the Court is full of the brightness of the Lord's glory! A sword! A sword is sharpened! The way is appointed that the sword may come! For the time for favor to Zion is here; yea, the set time is come!"

After this poured a gaunt horde numbering tens of thousands. They bore paving-stones, stakes, posts, railings, garden implements, weapons from kitchens, from hardware booths and from armories; anything that one man or a body of men could wield; torches and kettles of tar; chains and ropes; knotted whips, and bundles of fagots; iron spikes, instruments of torture, anything and everything which could be turned as a weapon or to inflict pain upon the Roman, who believed at this moment that Jerusalem was his!

The Christian overlooked this ferocious inundation and shook his head. On a mound near him stood the spirit of the mob concentrated and personified. It was crazed Posthumus.

He was screaming: "It is finished; the law is run out! All prophecy is fulfilled!"

And over his head he was swinging a parchment fiercely burning.

It was the Scroll of the Law!

After uncounted minutes, vibrating with roar, the terrible flood rushed by. Feeble arms clasped the Christian about the knees and he looked down on the tangled white locks of the palsied man, who had searched for him until he had found him. The Christian laid his hand on the man's head but did not speak.

At the breach in the Old Wall, the watchers on that almost deserted street saw the brazen wave of four legions gather and sweep forward to gain ground in the city before the mob swept down on them.

Between the two warring bodies, one orderly, prepared but apprehensive, the other mad and perishing, was a considerable space. Fighting still went on at the breach in the walls, but the supreme con-

flict of a comparatively small body of soldiers and an uncounted horde was not yet precipitated.

Ordinarily, the Roman army could have reduced any popular insurrection with half that number of men. But at present the legionaries confronted desperate citizens who were simply choosing their own way to die. Reason and human fear long since had ceased to inspire them. They were believing now and following a prophet because it was the final respite before despair. There was no alternative. It was death whatever they did, unless, in truth, this splendid sorceress was indeed the Voice of the Risen Prince. Force would be of no avail against them. Madness had flung them against Rome; only some other madness would turn them back.

The Christian, from his commanding position, expected anything.

It was the moment which would show if the false prophet would triumph. If the four legions went down before the multitude, it would mean the ascendancy of a strange woman over Israel, and the obliteration of the faith in Jesus Christ in the Holy Land.

It can not be said that the Christian watched the crisis with a calm spirit. He did not wish to see the

heathen overthrow the ancient people of God, nor could he behold the triumph of a false Christ. He put his hands together and prayed.

A figure appeared between the two bodies of combatants, rushing on intensely, to grapple.

It was a tall commanding form, clothed in garments that glittered for whiteness. By the step, by the poise of the head, the Christian recognized Seraiah.

The front of the multitude fell on their faces at that moment as if he had struck them down.

Out of the forefront, the prophetess appeared. The Christian heard her splendid voice out of the uproar, and while he gazed, he saw mad Seraiah turn away from her, with the front of the mob turning after him, as a needle turns to the pole.

In that fatal moment of pause, out of which the warning cry of the prophetess rang wildly, the Roman tribune, in view for a moment under the blowing veils of smoke, flung up his sword, the Roman bugle sang, and the brassy legions of Titus hurled themselves upon the halted mob.

The Christian dropped his head into the bend of his elbow and strove to shut out the sound. The ner-

vous arms of the palsied man at his feet gripped him frantically.

Up from the corner of the Old Wall, came the prolonged "A-a-a-a!" of dying thousands.

Jerusalem had fallen.

The foremost of the mob, turning with Seraiah, escaped the onslaught of the Romans, and as the mad Pretender strode toward the broad street from which the Tyropean Bridge crossed to the demesnes of the Temple, they followed him fatuously, blind to the death behind them and the oncoming slaughter in which they might fall.

Seraiah passed above the spot where the sorrowful Christian stood, crossed the great causeway leading toward the Royal Portico and after him six thousand blind and insane enthusiasts followed, expecting imminent miracle. Above them towered the heights of Moriah, now veiled in smoke. Up the great white bank of stairs they rushed after him, facing an ordeal which must mean a baptism in fire, and on through a curtain of luminous smoke into a gate pillared in flame, up into the Royal Portico, resounding with the tread of the advancing Destroyer, out into the great Court of Gentiles wrapped in cloud through

which the Temple showed, a stupendous cube of heat, through the Gate Beautiful where the Keeper no longer stood, thence into the Women's Court, raftered with red coals, up smoking stones tier upon tier till the roof of the Royal Portico was reached.

At the brink of the pinnacle, they saw through tumbling clouds Seraiah towering. He was looking down through masses of smoke upon the City of Delight, perishing. They who had followed watched, uplifted with terror and frenzy, and while they waited for the miracle which should save, the roof crumbled under them and a grave of thrice heated rock received them and covered them up.

Below, Nathan, the Christian, seized upon the shoulders of the Maccabee as he was dashing after the thousands. His face was black with terror for Laodice. He struggled to throw off Nathan, crying futilely against the uproar that Laodice was perishing.

"Comfort thee!" the Christian shouted in his ear. "She is saved. She sent me to thee."

The Maccabee stopped, as if he realized that he need not go on, but had not comprehended what was said to him.

Nathan dragged him out of the way, still choked with people struggling to pass on to the Temple or to flee from it. Half-way down the Vale of Gihon, where speech was a little more possible, the Maccabee, who had been crying questions, made the old man hear.

"Where is she? Where is she?"

"She has returned to her husband. In love with thee, she has done that only which she could do and escape sin. She has gone to shelter with him whom she does not love!"

The Maccabee seized his head in his hands.

"It is like her — like her!" he groaned.

In the Christian's heart he knew how narrowly Laodice had made her lover's mark for her.

"It is her wish," Nathan continued, "that I teach thee Christ whom she hath received."

"How can I receive Him, when He sent her from me?" the unhappy man groaned, unconscious of his contradictions.

"How canst thou reject Him when His teaching led thy love to do that which thine own lips have confessed to be the better thing?"

"Then what of myself, when I love where I should not love?" the Maccabee insisted.

"You may suffer and sin not," the Christian said kindly.

The unhappy man dropped to his knees.

"O Christ, why should I resist Thee!" he groaned. "Thou hast stripped me and made me see that my loss is good!"

The Christian laid his hands on the Maccabee's head.

"Dost thou believe?" he asked.

"Will Christ accept me, coming because I must?"

"It is not laid down how we shall baptize in the thirst of a famine," Nathan said, "yet He who sees fit to deny water never yet hath denied grace."

But the Christian's hand extended over the kneeling man was caught in a grip steadied with intense emotion. The unknown had seized him.

But for his feeling that this interruption was necessary to the welfare of another soul, the Christian would not have paused in his ministry.

The phantom straightened himself with a superb reinvestment of manhood.

"Thou, son of the Maccabee, Philadelphus!" he exclaimed to the kneeling man.

The Ephesian's arms sank.

"Who art thou that knoweth me?" he asked in a dead voice.

"I am all that plague and sin hath left of thy servant Aquila," the phantom declared.

The Maccabee lifted his face for what should follow this revelation. It was only a manifestation of his subjection to another will than his own. He was not interested — he who was hoping to die.

"Hear me, and curse me!" Aquila went on. "But save thy wife yet. I say unto thee, master, that she whom thou hast sheltered in the cavern is thy wife, Laodice!"

The Maccabee struggled up to his feet and gazed with stunned and unbelieving eyes at this wreck of his pagan servant, who went on precipitately.

"Her I plotted against at the instigation of Julian of Ephesus. Her, my mistress, Salome the Cyprian, robbed and hath impersonated thus long to her safety in the house of the Greek. This hour, through ignorance of thine own identity, through my

fault, she hath gone reluctantly to his arms. Curse me and let me die!"

The Maccabee seized the hair at his temples. For a moment the awful gaze he bent upon Aquila seemed to show that the gentler spirit had been dislodged from his heart. Then he cried:

"God help us both, Aquila! My fault was greater than thine!"

He turned and fled toward the house of the Greek.

The four legions of Titus swept after him.

Aquila lifted his eyes for the first time and gazed at Nathan.

"I cursed thee for sparing me to such an existence as was mine! Behold, father, thou didst bless me, instead. I am ready to die."

"Wait," the Christian said peacefully.

A moment later, the Maccabee dashed into the andronitis of Amaryllis.

After him sprang a terrified servant crying:

"The Roman! The Roman is upon us!"

A roar of such magnitude that it penetrated the stone walls of Amaryllis' house, swept in after the servant. Quaking menials began to pour into the

hall. Among them came the blue-eyed girl, the athlete and Juventius the Swan. These three joined their mistress who stood under a hanging lamp. Into the passage from the court, left open by the frightened servants, swept the prolonged outcry of perishing Jerusalem. Over it all thundered the boom of the siege-engines shaking the earth.

The slaves slipped down upon their knees and began to groan together. The silver coins on the lamp began to swing; the brass cyanthus which Amaryllis had recently drained of her last drink of wine moved gradually to the edge of the pedestal upon which she had placed it.

The dual nature of the uproar was now distinct; organized warfare and popular disaster at the same time. The Roman was sweeping up the ancient ravine. Jerusalem had fallen.

The gradual crescendo now attained deafening proportions; the hanging lamp increased its swing; the silver coins began to strike together with keen and exquisitely fine music. Juventius the Swan, with his dim eyes filled with horror, was looking at them. The peculiar desperate indifference of the wholly hopeless seized him. His long white hands

began to move with the motion of the lamp; the music of the meeting coins became regular; he caught the note, and mounting, with a bound, the rostrum that had been his Olympus all his life, began to sing. The melody of his glorious voice struggled only a moment for supremacy with the uproar of imminent death and then his increasing exaltation gave him triumph. The great hall shook with the magnificent power of his only song!

The Maccabee confronted Amaryllis, with fierce question in his eyes. She pointed calmly at the heavy white curtain pulled to one side and caught on a bracket. The brass wicket over the black mouth of the tunnel was wide.

Without a word, the Maccabee plunged into it and was swallowed up.

Amaryllis looked after him.

"And no farewell?" she said.

The thunder of assault began at her door. Juventius sang it down. The athlete and the girl crept toward the mouth of the black passage, wavered a moment and plunged in. After them tumbled a confusion of artists and servants who were swallowed up, and the hall was filled only with music.

The woman by the lectern and the singer on the rostrum had chosen. To live without beauty and to live without love were not possible to the one who had known beauty all his life, to the one who had learned love so late — after she had been beggared of her dowry of purity.

There was hardly an appreciable interval between the time of the desertion of her artists and the thunder of assault at her door, but in that space there passed before Amaryllis that useless retrospect which is death's recapitulation of the life it means to take. And out of that long procession, she singled one conviction which made the step of the Roman on her threshold welcome. It was an old, old moral, so old that it had never had weight with her, who believed it was time to reconstruct the whole artistic attitude of the world.

And that was why she waited impatiently at her doorway for death, which was a kinder thing than life.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ROAD TO PELLA

There was no incident in the Maccabee's long struggle through the inky blackness of the tunnel leading under Moriah.

It was night when the first new air from the outside world reached him. So he rushed into great open darkness, lighted with stars, before he knew that he had emerged from the underground passage.

Entire silence after the turmoil which had shaken Jerusalem for many months fell almost like a blow upon his unaccustomed ears. The air was sweet. He had not breathed sweet air since May. The hills were solitary. Week in and week out, he had never been away from the sound of groaning thousands. Not since he had assumed his disguise to Laodice in the wilderness had he been close to the immemorial repose of nature. All his primitive manhood rushed back to him, now infuriated with a fear that his love was the spoil of another.

All instinct became alert; all his intelligence and resource assembled to his aid. It came to him as inspiration always occurs at such times, that if the pair proceeded rationally, they would move toward a secure place at once. Pella occurred to him in a happy moment.

He took his bearings by the stars and hurried north and east.

He came upon a road presently, almost obliterated by a summer's drift of dust and sand. It had been long since any one had gone up that way to Jerusalem. There was no moon to show him whether there were any recent marks of fugitives fleeing that way.

He did not expect that Julian of Ephesus would have courage to halt within sight of the glow on the western horizon which was the burning from the Temple. He expected the Ephesian to flee far and long, and in that consciousness of the cowardice of his enemy he based his hope.

But he ran tirelessly, seeking right and left, led on by instinct toward the Christian city in the north.

At times, his terror for Laodice made him cry out; again, he made violent pictures of his revenge upon

Julian; and at other moments, he believed, while drops stood on his forehead from the effort of faith, that his new Christ would save her yet. There were moments when he was ready to die of despair, when he wondered at himself attempting to trace Julian with all the directions of wild Judea to invite the fugitives. Why might they not have fled toward Arabia as well, or even toward the sea? Perhaps they had not gone far, but had hidden in the rock, and had been left behind. Conflicting argument strove to turn him from his path, but the old instinct, final resource after the mind gives up the puzzle, kept him straight on the road to Pella.

He came upon the rear of a flock of sheep, heading away from him. A Natolian sheep-dog, galloping hither and thither in his labor at keeping them moving, scented the new-comer. There was a quick savage bark that heightened at the end in an excited yelp of welcome. The shepherd, a dim figure at the head of the flock, turned in time to see his dog leaping upon the Maccabee.

"Down, Urge," the shepherd cried.

"Joseph, in the name of God," the Maccabee cried, "where is Laodice?"

He threw off the excited dog and rushed toward the boy, who turned back at the cry with extended hands.

"True to thy promise, friend, friend!" the boy cried. "She is here!"

The Maccabee stiffened.

"Is there one with her?" he demanded fiercely.

"A man and her servant."

The Maccabee threw off the boy's hands.

"Where?" he cried.

"Ahead of the sheep," the boy said a little uncertainly.

The Maccabee dashed through the flock and rounding a turn in the road came upon Laodice walking; behind her Momus; at her side was Julian of Ephesus.

Immense strain had sharpened their sense of fear until it was as acute as an instinct. Before the sound of the Maccabee's furious approach reached Julian, the Ephesian whirled.

Towering over him, the very picture of retribution, was the man he had left, apparently dead by his hand, by the roadside in the hills of Judea months and months before.

For an instant, Julian stood petrified. Over his lips came a faint, frozen whisper that Laodice heard — that was proof enough to her, the moment after.

"Philadelphus — Maccabaeus!"

When his outraged kinsman put out vengeful hands to seize him, the Maccabee grasped the air. Julian of Ephesus had vanished!

Among the rocks at the base of the cliff that sheltered Christian Pella from the rude winds of the Perean mountains, the procurator of the city, Philadelphus Maccabaeus, and his wife, Laodice, sat side by side in the morning sun. There was a path little wider than a man's hand wandering along below them toward a well in the hollow of the rocks. Along this way, in early morning, Joseph, the shepherd, was in the habit of driving his sheep to drink. And hither the procurator and his wife came to visit the boy from time to time. Within their hall, there was too much state. Something in the wild open of Judea with its winds gave them all an ease whenever they wished to talk with Joseph.

But the shepherd was not in sight. The pair sat down and waited for him.

Laodice rested against her husband's arm, laid along the rock behind her. Presently he freed that arm and with the ease of much usage withdrew the bodkins from her hair. The heavy coil dropped over his breast down to his knee. With delicate touches he began to free from the splendid tangle a single strand of glistening white hair. When she saw it shining like spun silver across the back of his hand, she looked up at him. With infinite care he searched her face, while she waited with questioning in her tender eyes.

"This," he said, lifting the hand that supported the silver threads, "is the sole evidence that thou hast seen the abomination of desolation."

"And that came the night I journeyed away from Jerusalem, without you," she declared. "But, my Philadelphus," she said, turning herself a little that she might hide her face away from him, "had I stayed with you against my conscience, I had been by this time wholly white."

He kissed her.

"I did not expect you to stay," he said. "I knew from the beginning that you would not. Ask Joseph. He will bear me out."

Low on the slope of the hill, the shepherd approached, calling his sheep that trailed after him contentedly by the hundreds. The excited bark of Urge, the sheep-dog, came up faintly to them.

While they leaned watching them, old Momus, bent and broken, stood before them. Laodice hurriedly drew away from her husband's clasp. It was a habit she had never entirely shaken off, whenever the mute appeared, in spite of the old man's pathetic dumb protest.

He handed a linen scroll to his master.

It read:

The captives whom thou hast asked for freedom at Cæsar's hand are this day sent to thee, Philadelphus, under escort. They should reach thee a little later than this messenger. However, it is Cæsar's pain to inform thee that the Greek Amaryllis as well as the actress Salome were not to be found. Julian of Ephesus, who named the woman for us, is here at Cæsarea, but being a Roman citizen, is not a captive. However it shall be seen to that his liberty is sufficiently curtailed for the welfare of the public. Also, I send herewith a shittim-wood casket found with John of Gischala when he was captured in a cavern under Jerusalem. It contains treasure and certain writings which identify it as property of thy wife. There were other features in it which, coming to my hand first, made it advisable that the State should not know of its existence. And privately, it will be wise in thee to destroy them.

The Maccabee stopped at this point and looked at Laodice.

"What does he mean?" he asked.

"My father put your last letter in the case," she said, with a little panic in her face.

The Maccabee laughed, and went on,

Those that go forward to thee are Nathan of Jerusalem and Aquila of Ephesus. To thy wife my obeisances. To thyself, greeting.

CARUS, TRIBUNE.

THE END

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